

Autism in the Workplace

Identifying Employment Opportunities and Providing Support

By Raul Jimenez II, MST
and Amy Greenberg, BA
New Frontiers in Learning

Between 1997 and 2011, the unemployment rate of those diagnosed with disabilities has ranged from 72% to 88%. This is an astounding number of persons with disabilities and Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), specifically, without a job. Despite the enthusiasm, motivation, and dependability so many job seekers with ASD have in their will to work, many workplaces are hesitant to take the risk to support them, or lack the knowledge on how to support them in an employment setting. Supported employment is the opportunity for individuals with disabilities to be integrated in a working environment with the necessary supports to be successful. "The purpose of supported employment is to assist individuals with disabilities in becoming and remaining competitively employed in integrated work settings" (Wehman, Revell & Brooke, 2003, p. 167).



Flatow (1997) has argued that businesses should employ a team approach in determining workplace accommodations. Workplace supports can often times be either formal or informal. An informal workplace support evolves organically, and out of the daily workplace activities

and routines, such as a co-worker assisting another employee with completing a task, or setting a watch alarm to prompt when to take a break. A formal support is typically a company-sponsored program, like an employee assistance program (Unger, 1999).

According to Unger (1999), the roles of supervisors and co-workers are instrumental to the success of people with disabilities in the workplace. Support is essential in the following areas: learning how to complete tasks and regular job duties, how to perform infrequent duties associated with the position, learning how to complete novel tasks and assignments, taking lunch and other breaks, etc. Unger's research determined that success was ensued with the proper training and support in place to help those with disabilities in the workforce.

Examples of Supported Employment

A company in Guildford, CT, called Roses for Autism, trains, hires and provides other employment opportunities for older students and adults on the autism spectrum. According to Tomaino (2011), Roses for Autism enables participants to engage in numerous facets of business, including marketing, shipping, inventory management, data entry, website maintenance,

see Opportunities on page 16

Employment for Persons on the Autism Spectrum: Examination of the State of the Field and the Path to Pursue

By Dianne Zager, PhD,
Colleen A. Thoma, PhD,
and Samuel M. Fleisher, EdD

Despite evidence of the potential of individuals with autism to perform competitive jobs, employment rates for people on the spectrum remain extremely poor. Approximately 75% of adults with autism are unemployed or underemployed (Autism Society, 2011; Van Laarhoven & Winiaski, 2012). In 2013, the U.S. Department of Labor (2014) reported unemployment for people with disabilities at 11.9%, with labor force participation for people with disabilities at 18.7%. In fact, only 6% of individuals with autism are actively employed (Shattuck, Wagner, Narendorf, Sterzing, & Hensley, 2011). In an analysis of nationally representative data, Shat-

tuck et al. (2012) reported that in the eight years following high school only 53% of individuals with autism had worked for pay. Adult care and lost productivity from unemployment of individuals with autism have resulted in substantial costs to society. The annual cost for caring for the 1.5 million people in the U.S. with autism has been estimated from \$35 billion to \$60 billion (Autism Society, 2011), with the lifetime cost to care for a person with autism at \$3.2 million. Two-thirds of these costs occur after the age of 18 and are directly related to unemployment.

Unemployment rates for people with autism are significantly higher than for other disability categories because they face a disproportionately difficult time navigating work due to their unique cognitive, communication and behavior challenges. Individuals with autism have markedly different vocational needs than individuals

with other disabilities. Cimera and Cowan (2009) reported that adults with autism were more likely than adults with other impairments to be denied services because of the magnitude of their needs, which require a greater amount of services. Due to communication, cognitive, behavioral, and social needs that require intensive services and result in greater cost, they are less likely to obtain competitive employment.

There has been limited research and insufficient evidence to support the effectiveness of any particular vocational treatment approach for adults with autism, resulting in service delivery that is fraught with widespread lack of understanding of the employment support needs of this population. Only a fraction of research articles about autism have examined accessibility to employment support. The current lack of knowledge within the vocational rehabilitation (VR) system pertaining

to employment interventions for people with autism (Standifer, 2009), which has created a severe problem in meeting their needs. Müller, Schuler, Burton, and Yates (2003) reported widespread lack of adequate training, found VR services were not meeting the needs of this population, and stressed the need for better trained vocational service providers. Their findings indicated that counselors often lacked the training and background to assist persons with autism to obtain compatible employment. The lack of expertise in helping individuals with autism find and maintain work in the face of their unique challenges has contributed to persistent high rates of unemployment (Lawler, Brusilovkiy, Salzer, & Mandel, 2009), which has resulted in a critical problem that is negatively affecting employment outcomes. Given the

see Examination on page 18

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Jobs That Teach Employees and Employers

By Elise Hahn Felix, LCSW,
Shari Abel Saunders,
and Valerie Rosen
JCCA Compass Project

Jewish Child Care Association's Compass Project helps young adults with special needs identify career and educational directions and foster friendships through socialization programs. It also encourages participants to pursue their dreams. Compass staff helps clients develop job readiness skills, assists with job development and provides skillful coaching to prepare them for competitive employment and ensure their success in the workplace. "We are very pleased to see the progress of our clients," says Elise Hahn Felix, Director of the Compass Project. "And one of the special benefits is to see that many of our employers gain insight and learn from the experience as well." Jewish Child Care Association is a major nonprofit organization helping vulnerable children and families of all backgrounds. Here are some of their stories:

Freddy and Bryan work at Somerset Gardens in Plainview, which is an assisted living facility, and a subsidiary of Chelsea Gardens.

Last year Freddy and Bryan received vocational support at Compass. They did not have prior job experience but they wanted to work. According to Shari Abel Saunders, Compass Job Development Coordi-



JCCA Compass Project Interns at the Greenburgh Nature Center

nator, "We assessed their skills, interests and abilities and thought they would be well-suited to work at Somerset Gardens."

Their jobs were to assist the residents with such daily activities as Bingo, exercise classes, sing-alongs and dance. Paul Wasser, the Executive Director of Somerset, provides a nurturing, supportive workplace environment that enables the clients to build on their skills and gain confidence. He says, "My goal is to benefit the residents and staff. I see how the interns inter-

act with our residents, how they cheer them up and make their day a little brighter. And I see how they have added a spark and a positive dynamic to the recreation team. And aside from the business and health care decisions I am required to make on a daily basis, working with JCCA and the Compass Project has been one of the best decisions I have made for the company." "This is key," states Elise Hahn Felix. "Leadership and support from the top set the tone for the other staff."

Bryan did so well that after two months, Debbie Sweithelm, Recreation Director, offered him a part-time paid job. Bryan remarks, "It's so great. I get to come to work each day at a place where I already made friends and I feel part of the team. I am glad when I can put a smile on someone's face." Debbie continues, "These young men started off first as volunteer interns with stipends and have now become employees, making a contribution to our community. Work should not only be simply a way of earning income, but working to make a difference, and at the end of the day, making your place in this world."

Recently, a family member of a resident who had just moved into Somerset was so appreciative of how Freddy took the time to ensure her parent was well cared for, she praised Freddy's kindness on what could have been a stressful day for the whole family.

Restoration Farm

Restoration Farm, a beautiful family-run organic farm which operates as a CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) in Old Bethpage, New York has had many interns from Compass over the last several years. Husband and wife, Dan and Caroline Holmes, also have created a warm and welcoming environment in which Compass

see Teach on page 33



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 Seeing beyond disability.

Photo courtesy of Theresa Genovese for Cetra/CRI Architectural PLLC.

The Daniel Jordan Fiddle Foundation's "NYC Overload Project" Creates Employment for Singer/Songwriters

By Linda Walder Fiddle
 Founder and Executive Director
 The Daniel Jordan Fiddle Foundation

Envisioning and then creating innovative employment opportunities for adults living with Autism has always been a hallmark of The Daniel Jordan Fiddle Foundation's mission. Last spring, while attending a performance by participants from The Miracle Project New York, the seeds of another new inspiration were planted.

The Miracle Project New York group wrote a funny, satirical original song about their hectic hometown entitled "NYC Overload." The big-band Broadway style musical arrangement is about sensory overload (experienced by many on the autism spectrum) and the sights, sounds, smells (rats, pigeons, honking taxis, pizza pies) of NYC! After I saw the performance I thought that this song would be a great way to enhance awareness. I also felt that we could create a first-ever (to my knowledge) opportunity for these singer/songwriters to professionally record their song and get paid for doing so.

"This catchy song also promotes an understanding about the sensory issues many individuals living with Autism experience and find challenging as they engage



Linda Walder Fiddle at a Recording Session with NYC Overload Singer/Songwriters

in community life," says Vicki Ofmani, a member of The Daniel Jordan Fiddle Foundation Board of Trustees.

The Daniel Jordan Fiddle Foundation was established over a dozen years ago as the first Autism organization in the United States to focus exclusively on adults. Since then it has pioneered opportunities relating to all aspects of adult life and has developed many work experiences in the arts includ-

ing pop-up art galleries run by people on the spectrum, art studio employment, musical theater programs, and art mentorship programs that benefit adults living with Autism.

Says Ofmani, "Now The Daniel Jordan Fiddle Foundation has opened another door so that singers and songwriters on the spectrum can record their original music and get paid for it by hopefully sell the CD that is being produced."

Elaine Hall, founder of the Miracle Project, hopes to get celebrities engaged in the project for its next phase, including a group of Broadway stars. "It would be wonderful to add celebrity voices to create and even more professional recording that hopefully will lead to more awareness and support," says Hall. Stayed tuned for this...

The Miracle Project is a fully inclusive musical theater program for children, teens, and adults of all abilities. Through shared creative experiences with typically developing siblings and peers, those with autism and other disabilities grow in confidence and self-esteem; those without disabilities grow in compassion and understanding. Together they create an original musical.

The Miracle Project is the subject of the two-time Emmy award winning HBO documentary "Autism: The Musical," which has been shown all over the world.

The Miracle Project has received hundreds of requests to replicate it in other communities. The Miracle Project NYC is directed by Aaron Feinstein, who worked with the students to create "NYC Overload." "We were able to get professional musicians to donate their talent to record the track and the adults in our program were over the moon about recording live in a studio and getting paid as working singer/songwriters."

see NYC Overload on page 35

This is what success looks like...



This is what an adult living with autism looks like!

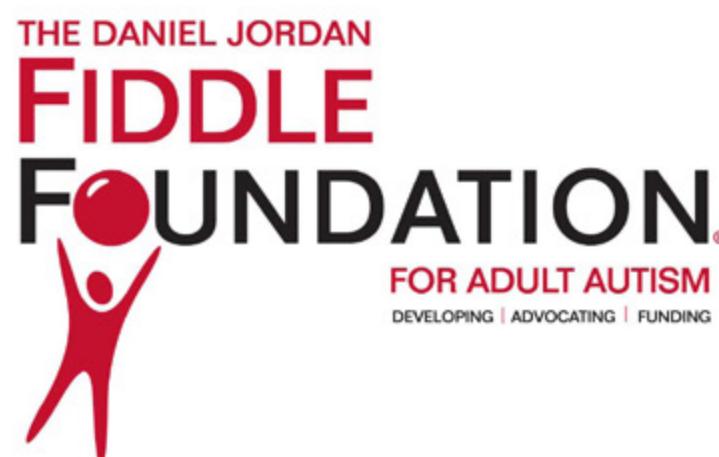
Building successful futures for adults living with autism takes innovative program development, advocacy, funding – and a belief in their strengths, talents and promise.

The Daniel Jordan Fiddle Foundation Signature Programs provide the blueprints that create opportunities for the diverse population of adults living with autism to build rewarding futures.

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Presenting Yourself at the Interview

By Yvona Fast, MLS
Author and Advocate

The employer liked your resume! You have been selected for an interview. You are excited but nervous because you know that often it's often the candidate who interviews best, not the one with the best qualifications, who gets the job offer. Your goal is to persuade the buyer that you are the best fit for the job they're trying to fill. Nowhere is this more important than at the interview.

Interviews screen out those who don't fit into the corporate culture. You are being judged on qualities like attitude, appearance, confidence, personality, conviviality.

This is also your chance to check whether this organization is where you want to use your talents. Does the job fulfill your expectations? Are you compatible with the organization and the other employees?



Yvona Fast, MLS

Body Language

For spectrum individuals, issues with nonverbal communication and body language often cause problems projecting confidence. Their lack of eye contact sets off warning flags in the interviewer's mind. He thinks, "Boy, I can't quite place my finger on it, but that guy is weird."

Remember to smile. Believe it or not, that makes a big difference. It makes you look self-confident, well-adjusted and happy to be there. Often the interviewer will make their judgment about the applicant during the first thirty seconds.

Dress neatly. Take care of personal grooming. Suck on a mint before your interview to make sure your breath is fresh. Try to greet people at the beginning and end the interview with a handshake.

Look at your interviewer. If you have trouble looking in the eyes, look at his nose. Eye contact shows the interviewer you are still on the same page. To avoid staring, remember to look away occasionally. Nod your head at appropriate times to show you are listening. Don't interrupt, but listen till the speaker is finished. In this way, you can gather important information that will help you formulate better answers and ask intelligent questions.

Avoid sofas or plush chairs. Sit up straight and keep your feet flat on the floor. To convey your interest, lean forward slightly towards the person you are addressing. Keep your hands in your lap, unless you are taking notes. Don't fold your arms; this is perceived as defensive or inaccessible. If you take notes, be sure you look attentive.

If you have habits others may find annoying, like rocking or shaking your leg, be aware of them and make sure they don't crop up.

If the interviewer starts shuffling papers or says something like, "We have a million other candidates to interview," that is your clue he/she wants to wrap up. Acknowledge that you realize time is about up. If you haven't gotten a chance to ask your questions, do so now but make them brief. End by asking what part of your background they would like to hear more about.

Know yourself - your skills, talents,

abilities, personal traits. List your accomplishments. Show the employer how your skills and abilities you bring will solve his or her problems and contribute to the organization.

Preparation is Your Best Friend

There is much you can do beforehand to make sure you make as good an impression as possible. Interview skills can be learned and practiced. Take classes and seminars in interpersonal communications, public speaking, and presentation skills. Learn all you can about interview and negotiation skills. The more you know about the process, the more comfortable you'll be, and the more confidence you will exude.

With a friend, teacher, or mentor, practice body language. What's your handshake like? It should be firm but not aggressive. Practice your answers to common interview questions. Tape record your answers, and listen for what you sound like. Pay special attention to the tone and volume of your voice.

Use self-talk to build confidence. In your home or car, before you go into an interview, tell yourself out loud why you deserve to get this job. This will help you to act with confidence even when you don't feel like it. If you believe it, so will the person you are interviewing with.

Questions, Questions...

There are a million questions that the interviewer could ask you, so it's hard to be prepared for everything. But lists of common questions abound. Prepare for these. If you are asked a question that trips you up, don't be afraid to pause and think about it. You might even use a phrase like, "That's an interesting concept. Let me think about that," to give yourself time to digest the question. If you can't think of an answer, it's OK to say so. You can think of ideas and answer in a follow-up letter.

Learn the difference between qualifying questions and those meant to disqualify.

see Interview on page 32

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An Employer's Perspective on the Benefits of Training People with Autism

By **Nadia Haque**
Operations Analyst
NewYork-Presbyterian Hospital
Westchester Division

As part of its clinical mission, NewYork-Presbyterian Hospital/Westchester Division (NYP/WD) cares for patients so they are prepared to return to their home communities to lead productive lives. To successfully achieve this, patients are given the necessary tools to be able to work and live. In keeping with this mission, NYP/WD was pleased when approached by New York Collaborates for Autism to participate in a high school to employment transition program for young adults with autism spectrum disorder called Project SEARCH Collaborates for Autism (PSCA). PSCA was created by New York Collaborates for Autism in partnership with NewYork-Presbyterian Hospital (NYPH), ARC of Westchester and Southern Westchester BOCES (SW BOCES). Now in its third year on our campus, we have discovered that employees gain as much from this partnership as the interns.

With our numerous clinical and non-clinical departments, NYP/WD is an ideal location to host this training program and expose interns to many different work environments so that they can explore a variety of career paths. The student interns are



Nadia Haque

evaluated for their independent employment and skills. Once determined, they receive classroom training from Southern Westchester BOCES, and job coaches from ARC of Westchester work with them on expectations, rules, and skills of a work environment. When the interns arrive at the job site, they receive additional practical, area-specific training. Interns work in de-

partments as varied as Pharmacy, Lab Services, Building Services, Plant Operations, Paint shop, Storeroom, Upholstery shop, Grounds and Landscaping, and Food and Nutrition. These are valuable and diverse opportunities for our interns, and they participate in 3 ten-week long rotations under the close supervision of our department directors and designated staff.

The focus of our interns' work experience is on non-traditional jobs, which are not the easiest to perform, and are complex and systematic in nature. We strive to give them marketable skills. As such, our interns learn to perform tasks such as system updates, computer configuration, courier/delivery services, supply stocking, medication sorting, preparing labels for medication storage bins, inventory recording, taking lab orders, and creating lab/pharmacy packages. They are closely guided, coached and supervised by the department staff, in addition to the mentoring they receive from their classroom instructors and job coaches. They are also coached on building communication, teamwork and collaboration skills which are essential for future employment.

The benefits of having a Project SEARCH intern are quickly apparent. While each individual with autism is unique, our interns have proven to be task oriented, independent, highly motivated, punctual in attendance, and team players. They are eager to perform repetitive,

step-by-step job responsibilities requiring time and patience that staff often finds tedious and time consuming. In addition, the interns are incredibly accurate when performing their assigned tasks. In their experience with the interns, staff noted the interns' strong work ethic and desire to complete assigned duties.

While the program's goal is to increase marketable skills for the interns, staff report receiving their own benefits from the program. Through meetings and surveys, participating managers and directors stress the value that individuals with autism bring to their department. Because of the individualized needs and concerns of each intern, staff needs to work as a team to make the internship successful, thereby resulting in greater collaboration amongst one another. In one department, the interns needed checklists to assist them through step-by-step tasks. Once staff saw how useful the checklists were for the interns, they are now used by the entire department, with the unexpected benefit of improved efficiency and accuracy.

By working in a real work site, managers have identified areas where the interns need additional support. While the interns are able to accomplish the assigned tasks, their social skills are lacking and they hesitate to ask for help. Staff continues to work with the job coaches on these areas.

see Training on page 38



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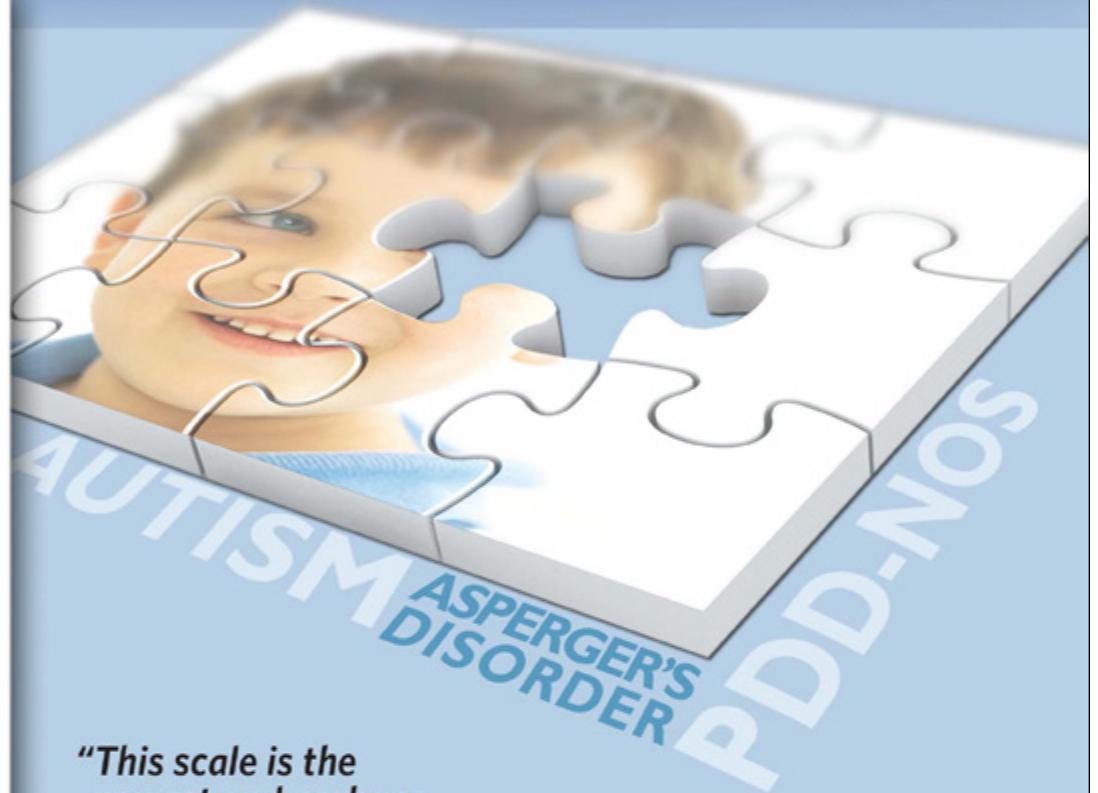
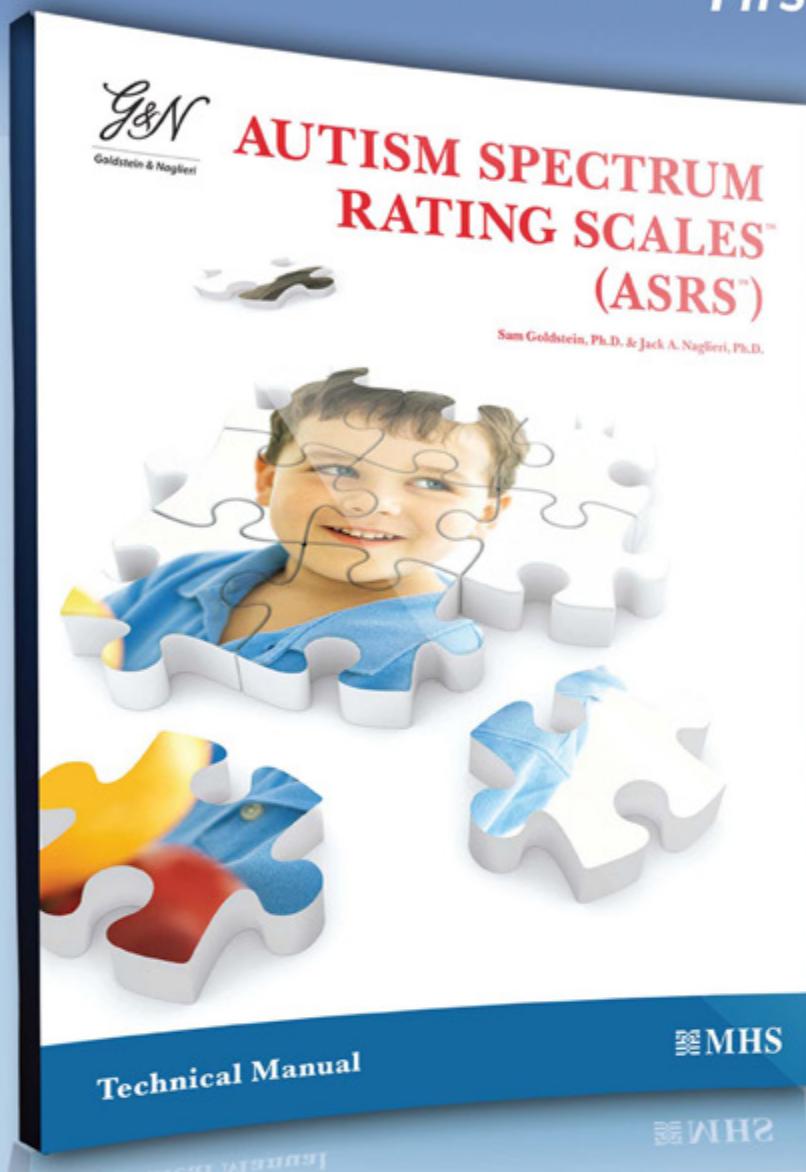


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-Kirsh, Aimee A. Assessment With Aimee, The Ohio School Psychologist, Volume 55, Number 2.

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My Journey to Independence

By Jay Mikush

My name is Jay Mikush, and I am 23 years old. When I was first diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome (AS) at the age of six, I had many challenges interacting with other children. Over the years, I have learned how to be more social with all sorts of people.

I am proud to have been born and raised in wonderful Winston-Salem, North Carolina. After I graduated from high school, I enrolled in the College Internship Program's (CIP) Brevard Center, a post-high school program for young adults with AS and other learning differences. During this time I also attended Brevard Community College in Melbourne, Florida where I learned how to live independently.

After I graduated from high school, I found out about CIP and its services from my parents. At first, I was not terribly interested in going because I could not imagine being away from home. However, when I arrived and got used to being away from home and knowing everyone and how the program worked, I got accustomed to it and realized it was a helpful environment to live in. I had many friends at Brevard and I participated in a variety of activities, including bowling and going to the beach.



Jay Mikush at his internship at Baer Air in Melbourne, Florida. Jay participated in flight school and was placed in his internship while attending the CIP Brevard program.

Social Skills

If I were to choose one of the most critical skills that I improved upon within the last few years, it would be social skills. I had the biggest issue with not being able to say "no" to peer pressure. This occurred mostly in high school where it caused me to get in a lot of trouble with my friends, which I now identify for what they really

are—enemies. Now I am able to say "no" in potentially dangerous situations.

I have made a lot of friends through the iCan House (www.icanhouse.org), a place for young adults with AS and social challenges in Winston-Salem, where I do many things with friends in my spare time such as visiting amusement parks, going to movies, biking, swimming, attending the local fair, bowling, mini golfing, and much

more. I also keep in touch with peers from CIP in the Melbourne area through social media such as Skype and Facebook.

Independent Living Skills

After attending CIP, I moved back to North Carolina, and I now live in my own apartment with a roommate. I am working with a life coach from the iCan House who is helping me with budgeting, cooking, and other skills. I feel that I have improved in the financial area because I do not spend as much on things that I want, such as a \$100 iTunes gift card. I generally focus on things that I need such as groceries or gas. Now I am much more cautious with spending my money.

Job Skills

I have a job coach from a service called Vocational Rehabilitation who is assisting me in seeking a full-time career in the aviation industry once I complete my associate's degree in aviation management.

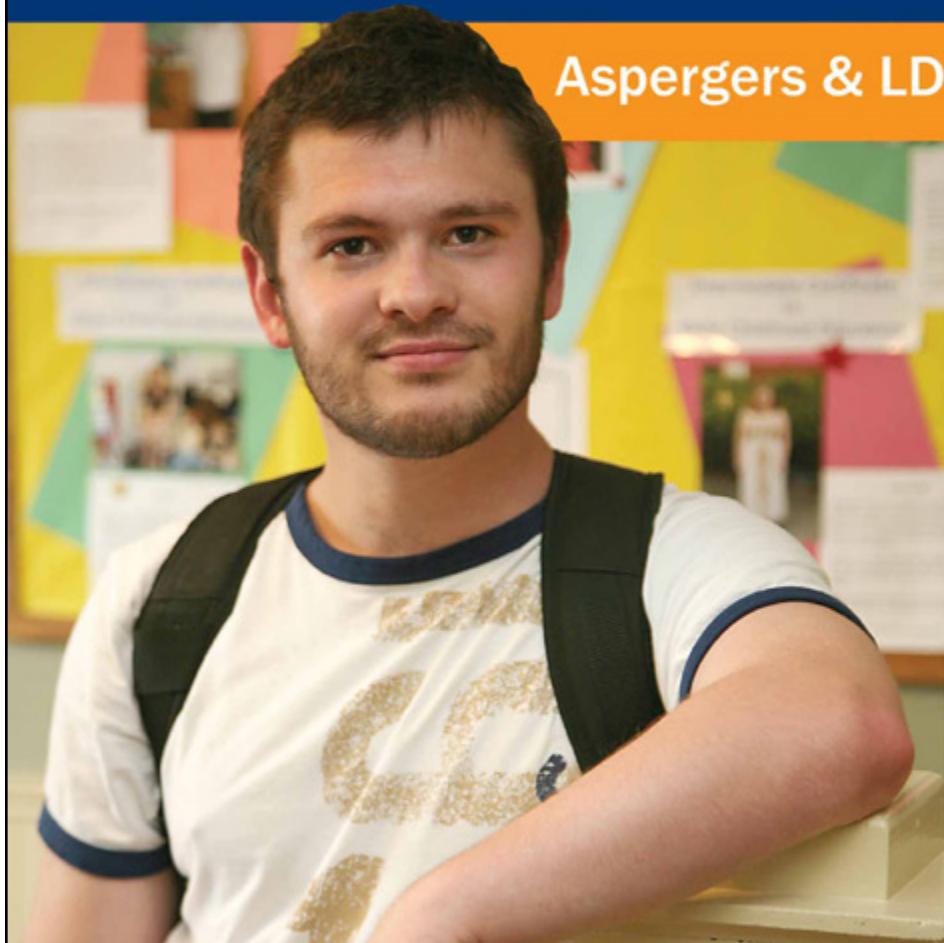
DJ

I own and operate a professional mobile DJ (disc jockey) business and do many types of parties and events throughout the city, county, and state. My long-term goal

see Independence on page 34

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Strokes of Genius develops artistic talents through professional art studio experiences and workshops to "Train the Talent." Directed by Mary Riggs Cohen, PhD, The Ongoing Academic and Social Instructional Support (OASIS) Program at Pace University provides a comprehensive college support program for students with autism, Asperger Syndrome, learning differences, and related challenges.



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Finding Positive Vocational Opportunities for Young Adults on the Spectrum

By Terri White, MPS
Director of Vocational Services
New York Institute of Technology

Each year 50,000 students on the autism spectrum reach 18 years of age. They are at a crossroads. Should they continue their education at their high school? Is pursuing a two or four-year college degree an appropriate pathway to the world of work and independent living? Or should they enroll in a vocational program to receive job specific training? Many are not ready to enroll in a degree bearing program or a vocational certificate program. Those that are not quite ready to move into either the world of work or higher education may consider a transition program.

Without some sort of intervention, the employment statistics for students on the autism spectrum are rather grim. Most of these numbers are anecdotal in nature. The highest employment rates from these reports are somewhere around 34% to 56% (Howlin, Goode, Hutton, & Rutter, 2004; Eaves & Ho; 2008). Other reports suggest the employment rate for individuals on the autism spectrum is less than 10% (Taylor & Seltzer, 2011). What are effective interventions to prepare students on the spectrum for employment?

Since 1987, the Vocational Independence Program (VIP) at the New York Institute of



Terri White, MPS

Technology's (NYIT) Central Islip Campus in Long Island, NY, has been invested in the placement of young adults with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), which includes Asperger's Syndrome or High Functioning Autism, and Learning Disabilities in employment internships. VIP prides itself on giving these young adults the tools necessary to become successful,

independent members of society and in the workplace through life and social skills coaching and vocational training.

Finding the right career field and position for these young adults is not an easy task, but is a key predictor of success or failure of their future lives. According to a secondary analysis of the National Longitudinal Transition Study (NTLS2), data revealed, "...whether the child graduated from high school, whether the child received career counseling during high school, and whether the child's school contacted postsecondary vocational training programs or potential employers were the significant factors associated with participation in employment" (Chang, Cheung, Li, & Tsai, 2013; p. 1832). Having a paid employment experience either during high school or shortly thereafter is another key predictor of employment after leaving high school.

In years past, the philosophy was that these young adults will have to conform and meet the expectations of society and businesses in general. Through the years, experience has shown, combined with the ever-increasing recognition within our society of the many disabilities that exist, that having a disability is not a predictable marker of failure in the workplace. These job placements are opportunities to provide a positive experience for intern and employer, as well as a stepping stone towards a future that conforms to young adults with an ASD as a beneficial part of the workplace.

The challenge is complex on all sides. They include knowing your intern, having your intern understand that he/she has to be productive and responsive to the requests of the supervisor, finding what you think is the right placement among your resources and with the employer you think will give him/her the best opportunity to succeed. That has always been difficult in the traditional choices of entry level positions in most common fields, with the exception of computer competencies, video production, clerical/office work and the arts. In these fields, within your local community, you may have limited opportunities in having suitable positions available. Again, it is quite a challenge.

Although there is a dearth of information on effective job training strategies, the first randomized clinical trial of vocational training as an intervention to increase the employability of young adults on the autism spectrum yielded promising results (Wehman, Schall, McDonough, Kregel, et al., 2014). Graduating high school seniors on the autism spectrum were randomly assigned to a 9 month intensive vocational training program or "a business as usual" control group, meaning they received the traditional transition services provided by the school and the office of vocational rehabilitative services. Employers participating in the study included a hospital, a

see *Vocational on page 31*

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ABA / Autism Insurance Coverage: Mandates and Self-Insured Companies

By Bryan Davey, PhD, BCBA-D
President, Highland Behavioral
Chief Clinical Officer, Ensure Billing

Let me start out by saying that I am trained as a Behavior Analyst. Following my coursework and practicum experience, I had a solid foundation to begin my career working with individuals with various diagnoses, including Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD). My training however was focused, and rightfully so, on the principles and procedures that define Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA). I was not trained in public policy, insurance mandates, issues related to professional licensure, how insurance carriers operate with respect to ABA, or how to file a claim for reimbursement.

In 2001 and 2007, Indiana and South Carolina became the first states to pass meaningful Autism insurance reform. Fast forward to 2014, and thanks to the efforts of advocacy groups, parents, and professionals, 34 states and the District of Columbia have adopted Autism insurance reform. These reforms in one way or another include ABA as a covered benefit for specific state regulated health plans. Further, over this same time frame many self-insured companies have adopted ABA and ASD coverage. Based on this movement, behavior analytic practitioners were thrust, willingly in most cases, into a realm that they were not familiar.

I, along with several of my colleagues across the nation, spend considerable amounts of time attempting to understand the realities of life after insurance reform, not to mention the potential impact of the Affordable Care Act. What is clear at this point is that each state is unique. Some states pass legislation without annual dollar limits (e.g., Alaska, California, Massachusetts), while other states have dollar limits based on age (e.g., Arizona, Missouri, Delaware). Some states have age limits (e.g., Kansas, Louisiana, Rhode Island) and others do not (New York, Oregon, Wisconsin). For the state reforms that define ASD and/or ABA as a behavioral health benefit, and subsequently impose age limits and monetary caps on treatment, carriers are pressed to understand how the mental health parity law will be interpreted and enforced by state insurance regulators. Further, each state's reforms may or may not impact large and small group plans or state employees. Finally, no state-based reform directly impacts self-insured companies.

Self-insured companies are governed by the Federal Employee Retirement Income Security Act, or ERISA as it is commonly known. This means that state reforms do not typically impact the plans offered by these companies. The premise of being self-insured is that the company funds its healthcare cost from within, so when deciding to add any benefits they are sensitive to cost increases. One interesting phenomenon in the self-insured research, is the data reported by Center for Disease Controls (CDC) that 1 in 88



Bryan Davey, PhD, BCBA-D

children are affected by an ASD. Employers and healthcare consultants in trying to calculate the costs of providing a benefit, erroneously multiply 1 in every 88 covered lives in their plan by some average cost of treatment. This calculation, which is often a very large number, is inflated for several reasons. Two of those reasons include: 1) Not every individual with an ASD will access the benefit; and 2) Not every individual with an ASD who does access the benefit will utilize the maximum dollar amount. This can be demonstrated by comparing those who need Focused ABA (e.g., assessment and treatment of problem behavior) at 10-25 hours per week, to those requiring Comprehensive ABA (e.g., intensive early treatment) at 26-40 hours per week. If the assumption is that every individual affected by an ASD will access 40 hours a week of treatment at a cost of thousands of dollars per week, then companies will end up believing that coverage is not financially feasible. In reality, there are more accurate ways to calculate a cost estimate. When specific variables such as percent of access, utilization of authorized services, and recipient's age, are used in the analysis, a more accurate and often less expensive cost are estimated.

Once a cost is estimated and a company decides to move forward, the benefit must be defined. While I cannot cover all of the aspects this process involves, I will touch on two areas for your consideration. First, cost share or copays. A company must realize that by requiring a copay to access ABA treatments, the use of those services might be impacted. If you think about an individual who receives treatment 3 times per week with a \$50 copay per visit, very quickly a family's expenses equal \$150 per week or \$600 per month. For many families, a copay in this amount could render a benefit financially unusable. Second, the plan must define who provides treatment. Does the plan adopt the

see Insurance on page 35



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Finding the Right Employment for Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder

By Michael J. Cameron, PhD, BCBA-D
Chief Clinical Officer
Pacific Child and Family Associates

Locating a place of employment is one of the most prevalent challenges for an individual with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). In fact, according to a study conducted in 2010 by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, only 21% of all adults with disabilities participated in the labor force as compared with 69% of non-disabled adults (www.autism-society.org/about-autism/facts-and-statistics.html). This is a truly alarming statistic, and with a projected 625% increase in adults (over the age of 22) with ASD in the next 16 years, these unemployment numbers will rise if the current trend continues.

What we must remember is that these individuals with ASD require valuable work experience to round out purpose and significance in their lives while being able to earn a meaningful wage, just as individuals without disabilities do.

To approach this escalating matter, there are ways for individuals to find employment fitting for each and every person. The importance of a responsive and accepting culture to address this need is imperative in order to develop opportunities, and fortunately, there is a growing interest among the population in effective employ-



Michael J. Cameron, PhD, BCBA-D

ment program models and in employment opportunities. What is unique about the American culture, however, is its technical and corporate culture, which results in specialized employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities. This isn't the same case with areas outside of the United States where people with disabilities are incorporated and accepted into the workforce more – oftentimes employed in less technical and more diversified jobs.

For parents, clinicians, teachers, and loved ones of individuals with ASD who are looking for employment options for the

individual, I recommend the below process be put into action in order to find the best opportunity for the person at hand:

1. Assess the individual by taking a strength-based approach
2. Find the job based on the person's strengths and interests
3. Analyze the job
4. Prepare the individual
5. Prepare the employer and other employees
6. Expand upon growth

Start with a strength-based approach – or the notion of identifying a person's talents and abilities and utilizing or building upon them for growth. This method of pinpointing what a person is good at or enjoys and connecting that to an employment opportunity harnesses success for both the individual and the employer, just like it does in the workplace for employees who are not disabled. Through thorough assessment, I have seen many individuals with ASD have unique and differing skills that can carry over into the workplace. For instance, if a person has good motor skills, they may be great in the area of fashion (assembling garments) or jewelry making. An individual with great upper strength would likely

excel in physical work such as farm work, construction, or the lumber industry.

Many individuals with ASD or other disabilities find their jobs through many of the same means as people without disabilities. Job search engines like Monster, Career Builder, Craigslist, and so forth, are common places to narrow down and locate a possible job. Another excellent way to seek out a job is through family, friends, and acquaintances. These are sometimes the best ways to finding a job where the individual may already have experience with the company, such as a local supermarket, library, or school. What is most important is connecting the assessment of the person with a fitting job and having a compassionate culture willing to offer jobs to open up opportunities for individuals.

Once you have a good sense of the analysis of the person and what the job may be, it is important to break down the scope of the job so you can begin priming the individual. I encountered a situation recently that is a great example of how to break down the context and social circumstances to best prepare the person. The individual with ASD involved, Ethan*, had the opportunity to work at an organic farm. The farmer was open to having Ethan work on the farm, but Ethan's parents were unsure if their son would be beneficial. I went to the farmer and asked what tasks Ethan

see *Finding on page 22*

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When College is Not an Option

By **Nicholas A. Villani**
President
Career and Employment Options, Inc.

College is generally considered the best path to a successful career, but the classes and structure of college can present a daunting challenge to individuals on the spectrum. The description of a "good job" might include factors of salary, stability, and the ability to grow; such jobs are not reserved only for college graduates.

Some of the more stable, high paying jobs are within businesses or organizations that do not require college or at least the traditional college route. Instead, those jobs may require a specific skill or trade, consistency in performance, willingness to work diligently at assignments requiring a different kind of skill and employee. Guidance counselors often are not trained or find themselves in political disagreement with a parent if they recommend anything other than traditional college as the post-secondary option. Also, high schools are given high marks based upon their college entrance rates, so traditional college is generally recommended.

But what are the options? Post-secondary options we consider "stable and typical outcomes" like traditional college are not necessarily stable nor provide the outcome expected. Many students enter traditional



Nicholas A. Villani

college to quickly drop out without a degree. They have failed in the new academic arena not necessarily because they are incapable but because of changes in the support system and environment. Many families are not even told about the post-secondary supports that ACCES/VR can provide through 790x, which are post-secondary, non-academic support services. These services can be used by students in post-sec-

ondary education to assist them to organize, prioritize, and plan their academic work. And what is rarely presented to these students while in high school is that there are other types of post-secondary alternatives that are highly technical in their format with significantly better employment outcomes. Schools providing Associates in Occupational Sciences often have significantly higher placement rates with better salaries than students graduating with a BA in Liberal Arts.

During the last year, I have been exploring options that are viable opportunities for qualified students that did not necessarily follow the traditional college route. There were five areas of occupational categories that met the criteria of a "good job." They can offer individuals on the spectrum even more stability as they are highly structured and have the characteristics of organizational support and structured jobs.

1. Federal Jobs - One of the places to look is USAJobs, the website for jobs in the federal government (<https://help.usajobs.gov>). Looking there does not necessarily ensure that the person would find a job, however, it is a resource for someone to begin the process of putting in their name and resume toward one of the jobs listed. There are jobs for people with and without degrees. There is also a page for individuals with a disability to peruse.

2. Civil Service Jobs at State or Local Levels - Both state and local government have what is known as a 55a or 55b waiver that enables someone with a disability to be given access without necessarily meeting the requirements of passing the civil service tests.
3. MTA, Long Island Railroad (LIRR) and other municipal jobs - Often considered difficult to access, we consider those organizations to be very fraternal, but with both persistence and new changes in laws these jobs can be accessible.
4. Union Jobs - They are still most sought after as they offer higher pay, a unique support system, and better benefits than non-union jobs. One can consider a job within the specific trade of a union, or also consider jobs within the support systems of those union members.
5. Utilities - Water Authority, Long Island Power Authority (LIPA - now PSE&G), National Grid, Verizon, Cablevision and other like utilities. They can offer stability, good pay, and excellent benefits.

All of these jobs still require persistence in the pursuit, good career skills (resume,

see *College* on page 34

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Lynda Geller, PhD, Founder and Psychologist
Rahimeh Andalibian, PsyD, Psychologist
Ronni Aronow, MA, MS, College Transition Consultant
Jaime Black, PsyD, Psychologist
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Leslie Sickels, LMSW, Social Worker
Ilene Solomon, PhD, Neuropsychologist
Nancy Waring Weiss, MS, CCC-SLP, Speech and Language Pathologist
Beth Yurman, PsyD, Psychologist

The Asperger Syndrome Training & Employment Partnership (ASTEP) focuses on employer education and training, and advises employers on how to recruit and manage employees with Asperger Syndrome. www.asperger-employment.org

Asperger Syndrome and High Functioning Autism Association (AHA) provides support programs, conferences, activities, a hotline and reliable, up-to-date information for individuals and families. www.ahany.org

Career and Employment Options, Inc. (CEO) provides transition supports for students in special education and job placement services for students and adults with Asperger Syndrome and other disabilities. www.ceoincworks.com

The Elija Foundation provides advocacy support, educational outreach and comprehensive workshops in Applied Behavior Analysis for educators and family members. www.theelijahfoundation.org

Contact us through www.spectrumservicesnyc.com for clinical services.

Please visit www.aspergercenter.com for articles of interest for families and adults with Asperger Syndrome.

Opportunities from page 1

receiving and fulfilling orders and customer service. Informal supports include prompting, reminders, advice and/or guidance, while formal supports include an employment specialist.

Organizations like Roses for Autism are proof and inspiration that success can happen when proper supports are in place. Students on the autism spectrum can be productive, valued employees of many corporations. Companies need to apply such supports so that more individuals with autism get the opportunity to be successful in the workplace.

Interventions: Forming an Alliance in a New Workplace

What are some of the necessary steps to support individuals on the spectrum in a workplace less prepared than the example above? Focus is required in addressing and identifying current obstacles already existing for individuals with ASD within the job market. Further, the implementation of key strategies for an employee's integration into a new work community, and how to effectively manage and encourage new growth and participation in such a work environment once hired, is integral. As future employers continue to become educated on disability in the workplace, vocational advocates and coaches can provide a crucial and highly empowering service in aiding, organizing, and acclimating individuals with ASD to the world of work.

Obstacles faced by job-seeking participants with ASD have been grouped into four major categories: Mastering the job



Raul Jimenez II, MST

application process, acclimating to new job routines, communication, and lastly, navigating social interactions with supervisors and co-workers (Muller, Schuler, Burton, & Yates, n.d.). Some individuals report difficulties in creating a professional resume, while others face difficulties in job interviewing and phone contact and follow up, and report a generalized feeling of being overwhelmed throughout the entire job application process. With these struggles in mind, a vocational coach or "job coach" can assist in making such processes seem less arduous. Creating tools and strategies before the job search can help differentiate an individual's work strengths, as they are



Amy Greenberg, BA

needed in a current job market. Such assessment tools include: An identification of niche career interest, personality type, sensory sensitivities, and intervention needs in the practice of social skills, eye gaze, greetings, introductions and interviewing techniques (Johnston-Tyler, n.d.). Synthesizing how an individual's unique talents, interests, and needs align with current occupations through job matching, is a great means for approaching the job search in a way that is career-minded, well defined, and ultimately, rewarding. Johnston-Tyler's suggestions to develop an "elevator pitch" of job interests, revise resumes, practice interviewing techniques and build

networking skills are fundamentals which not only familiarize an individual on the spectrum with their own abilities, but encourage the self-determination and self-advocacy so vital to a burgeoning work environment during career development.

An important consideration for an employee with ASD is the individual's decision of whether or not to disclose a documented disability and request accommodations. These decisions require asking big-picture questions. Assessing an individual on the spectrum's adaptability to a "neurotypical" workplace and, conversely, assessing a "neurotypical" workplace's adaptability and tolerance of the needs of a "neurodiverse" employee, is precisely the area in which so many work environments fail to evaluate. These conversations are ones that take time and patience on both sides, and mark the beginning of a nuanced and unique consideration of an employee with ASD to the work environment. Career counselors can provide essential support in communicating work areas of difficulty, such as: social communication, sensory sensitivities, processing and organizational abilities, and behavior management. Similarly, identifying if and where an employer shows themselves fit for demonstrating acceptance of diversity, providing non-management tracks for promotion of technical workers, focusing on merit as a primary criteria for promotion, allowing flexibility in work hours, ability to telecommute, and outlining consistency in daily job duties and schedules can provide immeasurable relief and clear understanding for a newly hired employee (Johnston-Tyler, n.d.).

see Opportunities on page 38



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By The YAI Network

The many challenges confronting the field of developmental disabilities require new perspectives and approaches. YAI's International Conference, "Designing the Future," will explore innovative models and solutions on April 28-May 1, at the New York Hilton Midtown, 1335 Avenue of the Americas.

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"The issues confronting us as a field are real, diverse and complex," said Matthew Sturiale, Interim CEO of YAI. "Change is a necessity, not a choice. It is time to work more effectively to help

the people we support live the life they desire and deserve." Among the highlights are:

- Thorkil Sonne, President, Specialisterne USA, will discuss "The Power of Difference" on Monday, April 28 as part of the keynote session from 9 a.m.-noon. Specialisterne USA assesses, trains and employs individuals with autism as consultants in IT and other tech sectors.
- Moira Lewis and Brooker Lozott, Marcus Autism Center in Georgia, "Unfolding of autism spectrum disorder symptoms in the first year of life, April 28, 1:30-4:30 p.m.
- Expanded behavior analysis workshops featuring Dr. Vincent J. Car-

bone, Director, Carbone Clinic, Tuesday, April 29, 9 a.m.-noon; and Jose A. Martinez-Diaz, Professor and Associate Dean, Florida Institute of Technology, School of Behavior Analysis in Florida, Thursday, May 1, 9 am-3 pm.

- Dr. Jill Krata, Manager of Clinical Services, YAI Autism Center, and Dr. Valerie Gaus, Clinical Psychologist, on positive psychology, Tuesday, April 29, 1:30-4:30 p.m.
- Dr. Stephen Shore, Assistant Professor of Special Education, Author, Adelphi University, is among the panel to present on the power of collaboration, Wednesday, April 30, 9 a.m.-noon. He also will participate in a new Self-Advocacy Summit,

later that day from 1:30-4:30 p.m.

- A special session for family caregivers on April 30, 5:30-7:30 p.m., with Dr. Tamar Heller, Professor and Head, Dept. of Disability and Human Development; Director, Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Aging with Developmental Disabilities, University of Illinois at Chicago

For more information and to see the full conference brochure, visit yai.org/conference2014. Questions? Contact Abbe Wittenberg at abbe.wittenberg@yai.org or 212-273-6472.

Special conference rate at the Hilton New York is available until April 9, 2014. Call 212-586-7000 and use group code YAI. The special rate also applies to weekends, based on availability.

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See Page 43 for Details

Examination from page 1

juxtaposition of evidence that people with autism can successfully sustain employment when provided with adequate support and reports showing the inadequacy of employment support, there exists today a dire need to provide information on evidence-based approaches that can be employed in the delivery of employment training and support for individuals with autism.

Universal Design for Transition

One approach that offers appropriate evidence-based practices available for preparing adults with autism for employment is Universal Design for Transition (UDT). The principles and practices of UDT have been shown to be highly effective in preparing persons with disabilities for transition to work (Scott, Saddler, Thoma, Bartholomew, Alder, & Tamura, 2011). The UDT approach can provide the overarching philosophy and framework for employment preparation and support, serving as a guide to move individuals toward identifying and attaining employment goals.

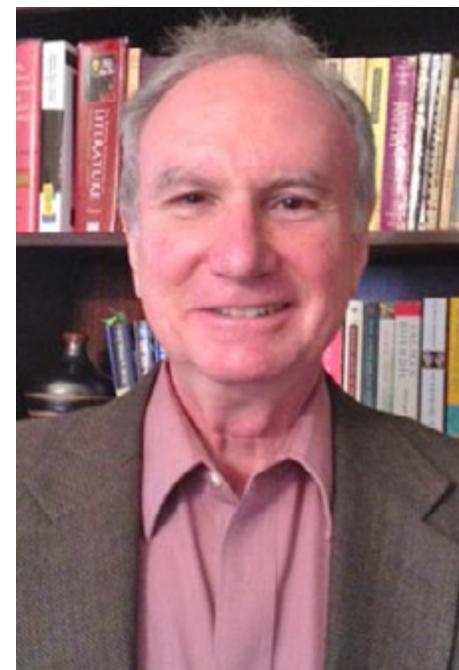
UDT principles recognize that individuals are different in how they learn and acquire skills, how they interact with other people and with their environment, and how they are able to demonstrate knowledge or skill mastery. UDT-based instruction modifies and adapts learning activities rather than trying to change the individual. The UDT framework offers instruction that is designed to prepare individuals for employment, taking into account their learning characteristics, abilities, interests, and challenges (Thoma, Bartholomew, & Scott,

**Dianne Zager, PhD**

2009; Zager & Alpern, 2010). Essentially, the goal of UDT is to enable all individuals to obtain and sustain employment in community-based settings by ensuring that the work environment is maneuverable, manageable and satisfying for all users. The UDT model was created by building on the Universal Design principles of (1) multiple means of representation (i.e., varied ways to present information that needs to be learned); (2) multiple means of expression (i.e., alternative methods of assessment to demonstrate skills and knowledge learned); and (3) multiple means of engagement (i.e., connecting work to personal interests

**Colleen A. Thoma, PhD**

to increase motivation) (Rose & Meyer, 2006). In UDT, employment tasks are scaffolded so that participants can enter tasks at their own level. Assistive technology plays a significant role in UDT as it offers multiple avenues for information presentation, acquisition, task completion, and expression of knowledge. Goals are accomplished through concrete presentation of information related to individual interests and needs. Through UDT's framework, knowledge and skills needed in jobs are made meaningful through real world tasks, so that curriculum content can be mastered in real work environments (Thoma, Bar-

**Samuel M. Fleisher, EdD**

tholomew, & Scott, 2009). For example, a person who wants to work in a hospital lab needs skills in measuring liquids (math), using lab equipment (science), and reading skills to identify the appropriate materials to use as well as to match the test with the patient (reading/English).

Elements of Effective Employment Intervention

The following elements should be featured throughout employment intervention

see Examination on page 42

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Workplace Insecurities - Changing the Tide for Adults on the Spectrum

By Melanie Goldberg, LMSW
Caring Commission
UJA-Federation of New York

At some point, most of us will find ourselves writing a resume, going on an interview and, hopefully, fielding a job offer. We'll spend most of our adult lives waking up, enduring some kind of commute, performing a series of tasks, returning home — only to repeat the process again the next day. And most of us won't think twice about it. For many, work is a simple and inevitable concept. For individuals with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), however, work is neither simple nor inevitable. Instead, it represents a million small interactions that require constant thought, accommodation, and perseverance.

UJA-Federation of New York is the largest local philanthropy in the world, caring for all New Yorkers in need and strengthening the Jewish community in New York and in 70 countries around the world. Part of this work includes increasing the inclusion and independence of families and individuals with special needs. Because UJA-Federation is committed to reducing the barriers that exist for young adults with ASD to enjoy opportunities that are available in mainstream settings, two years ago we started to map out a comprehensive plan.



Melanie Goldberg, LMSW

Working with the Autism Science Foundation, a survey was created in the spring of 2012 and distributed to explore the broad needs of young adults on the spectrum and to specifically identify obstacles to obtaining and maintaining employment. Using the Interactive Autism Network (IAN) national online registry, UJA-Federation reached out to three sub-groups: young

adults on the spectrum, ages 18-35, who are legally independent; parents of young adults with ASD in that same 18-35 age bracket who are legally independent; and legal guardians of young adults with ASD who are not independent and require supervision under legal guardianship. Not surprisingly, the results clearly showed that work opportunities held the most potential to foster independence and inclusion of this unique population.

Work Experiences,
Neither Happy Nor Secure

More than 200 individuals with ASD, parents, and legal guardians responded to the survey. Of the independent young adults with ASD who completed the survey, the vast majority (87 percent) reported that they worked in the past year (either paid employment, internships, or volunteer placements) and, most were working in full-time employment of 30 hours or more per week. Of these respondents, nearly half reported dissatisfaction with their job because "they didn't make enough money," "weren't able to use their skills," or "were not working in a field that interested them."

Two-thirds (64 percent) of the responding independent young adults with ASD who reported working in the past year had, at some point, lost a paid job or internship. Seventy percent of these respondents who lost jobs had been fired, and, 43 percent had

been laid off or "downsized." High levels of dissatisfaction or discomfort were also seen in the more than half of those working who quit their positions, paid or unpaid.

Drilling down further into these figures, the report found that characteristics typically associated with ASD contributed to an individual getting fired or laid off. Specifically, respondents reported that "social mistakes" were the most predominant reasons behind losing a job, followed by an inability to "work fast enough," "stay organized," or "get along with others." One-fourth of the young adults reported they were let go because "people didn't understand or were uncomfortable" with their autism. Social issues were also reported by a large majority of independent young adults with ASD as the reasons for why they could not obtain employment today.

Finally, additional key findings included a lack of structured activity, an inability to find meaningful ways to spend their time, and difficulties in accessing services and navigating systems as the largest barriers to achieving life goals after high school.

Dream Big and Bold

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see *Insecurities* on page 35



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Providing Opportunities for Employment

By L. Lynn Stansberry-Brusnahan, PhD,
University of St. Thomas in Minnesota
and Debra Cote, PhD,
California State University, Fullerton

Integrated work experiences enhance the quality of life for those living with ASD, reduce financial strain on aging parents, and contribute to the economic development of communities. A lack of supports and low expectations can result in sheltered work experiences, unemployment, and underemployment for people with ASD. Levy and Perry (2011) found the average percentage of individuals with ASD who find work is 24% with job status and stability typically low (Barnhill, 2007; Eaves & Ho, 2008; Howlin, Alcock, & Burkin, 2005). An analysis of the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 data found only 27.9% of youth including those with autism were employed (Carter, Austin, & Trainor, 2011). Another study put the percentage of youth with developmental disabilities employed in integrated jobs with competitive wages at only 14.2% (Simonsen, 2010). In this article, we highlight four initiatives, among the many emerging across the nation, working to provide employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities. These include: (a) Wisconsin Board for People with Developmental Disabilities, (b) Minnesota Life



L. Lynn Stansberry-Brusnahan, PhD

College, (c) Autism Society of Minnesota, and (d) Specialisterne Midwest.

Wisconsin Board for People with
Developmental Disabilities

The Wisconsin Board for People with Developmental Disabilities (WI-BPDD) is dedicated to improving the independence, productivity, and integration of people with developmental disabilities through projects such as *Let's Get to Work*



Debra Cote, PhD

(<http://www.letsgettoworkwi.org/>). Executive Director Beth Swedeen reports that this project implements practices that elevate community expectations and employment outcomes for youth with disabilities. WI-BPDD's project promotes working with school sites and communities to implement a coordinated set of evidence-based practices that expand competitive employment in integrated settings.

Participating school sites create *school-wide opportunity maps* to identify paid and

pre-vocational employment opportunities existing throughout the school and community. Starting early in adolescence, person-centered planning is utilized and the project connects families with post-secondary options and resources such as the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation. Teachers are engaged in this project as they play an integral role in implementing transition programming and providing access to general education and extra-curricular activities related to students' interests/career goals. Inclusion in general education classes is an important focus, because when students with disabilities are not active in their schools, employers, families, and the larger community have trouble envisioning them as potential workers, thereby reinforcing low vocational expectations (Swedeen, Carter, & Molfenter, 2010; Test et al., 2009). Additionally, inclusive classes and extra-curricular activities provide career possibilities, opportunities to develop skills, and access to connections that open doors to job or volunteer experiences (Wagner, Newman, Cameto, Levine, & Garza, 2006). The schools are identifying opportunities for inclusion and participating in models such as co-teaching in general education classrooms to support students.

Community awareness and involvement is a second focus of the project. By engaging the broader community and decision

see *Providing on page 36*



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The Lighter Side of the Spectrum ~ A Mom's View

By Carrie Cariello

When Your Grandchild Has Autism

I'm always struck at the number of grandparents who turn up at the public reading I have been doing since publishing my book. During the discussion afterwards they usually ask similar questions; "I have a granddaughter with autism. What should I do when she flaps her hands?" or, "Why do the tags on his sweater bother him so much?"

One time I met a tall slender man with thick white hair in Barnes & Noble. He talked to me for almost ten minutes about his twelve-year old granddaughter's bright blue eyes, her fear of the dark, and her obsession with Teenage Ninja Mutant Turtles. And then he looked straight at me and asked if I thought she would ever get married.

Whether they go by Grandma and Grandpa or Nana and Pop or Meme and Bumpa, they all ask about sensory integration and weighted blankets and self-stimulation: the buzzwords that weren't around when they had small children. They are hungry for knowledge and yearn to connect with their sometimes spinning, oftentimes silent grandsons and granddaughters.



Jack with his Grandparents

I never feel like I have enough time to answer these questions the way I would like, so I stammer and stumble through something meaningless and disjointed. Then I pack up the extra books and my black pen and walk to my car feeling unfinished, incomplete.

My husband Joe is the youngest of six children in a large Italian family, and out of twenty grandchildren, my son Jack is the

only one diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder. (Yes, that's right: *there are twenty grandchildren*. When we all get together we total well over thirty. I don't even have autism and I get overwhelmed.)

Back when we were in the process of Jack's diagnosis, we lived in Buffalo, NY and Joe's parents lived in Lake Carmel, NY - a six hour drive away. Over the phone every week I would describe Jack's lack of

speech, his delay in development, the eerie way he wouldn't look at me. And they always said the same thing: give it time, his older brother **Joey** is talking for him; *he is fine, he is fine, he will be fine*.

Jack was nearly three when we moved to New Hampshire, and my in-laws followed from Lake Carmel about a year later. By that point it was well understood that Jack was not fine.

Before long they started taking some of the other kids to sleep at their house, to teach them meatball-making and sing them to sleep in the small guest room. But not Jack. One time they drove down the driveway with Jack's brothers Joey and Charlie waving from the backseat of their Saturn while he stood next to me, turning the same Little People figure over and over in his hand. I couldn't help but feel as though some invisible line had been drawn; them, but not him. They would never understand him, never be able to handle him.

And who could blame them? At that time Jack was a total flight risk, adept at picking locks and slipping silently out the door. He only knew about a dozen words. He threw giant tantrums and woke several times a night. The truth is, they were as heartbroken as we were. They longed to connect

see *Grandchild* on page 28



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How Autism Changed One Family for the Better

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Becoming an Autism Employment Entrepreneur

By Marjorie Madfis
Founder and President
Yes She Can Inc.

Last fall, after a 30 year career in corporate marketing, I joined the ranks of a handful of other parents and social service agencies in a new movement referred to as autism employment entrepreneurship. I founded Yes She Can Inc. as a nonprofit dedicated to developing job skills and employment opportunities for young women with autism spectrum disorders.

Channeling a Passion

My daughter, who is almost 18, has always loved American Girl dolls. She has been and is excessively brand loyal having started her collection at age 3 with a Bitty Baby as a gift, and now (I hate to admit it) has 8 American Girl dolls. She loves reading the story books about a 10-year-old girl in a particular time in history as well as the contemporary advice books about caring for your body and your emotions. She knows each historical doll's outfits and she makes up personas for her "girls of today." She spends hours on the website playing games and studying the catalog.

Years ago I had wondered how to channel this passion and expertise into a future for her. "My dream job is to work at



Dani helping to set up store displays

American Girl Place" she has always said. I thought given her passion perhaps she could actually have a job at the store - IF. If she could take the train to Grand Central and then walk to the store - without being abducted. If she could handle 20 hours a week of work in a highly stimulating retail environment - where everything she sees she wants. If American Girl would even hire her - with a job coach.

But what if she couldn't and they wouldn't? So I thought about creating the same environment that she loves in the

store: the merchandise for sale, the doll hair salon, the cafe, and the library, (and they used to have a performance theater). The twist would be that the merchandise we would sell would be previously owned for resale. And that there would be many jobs that she and young women like her could do. And I knew there would be demand for the product.

I also wanted to make sure that there would be opportunity for employees to develop skills that they could transfer to other jobs with other companies - perhaps

a teen fashion store or toy store. My vision was not just creating a job for my daughter, but starting a career for many young women. If I wanted to have an impact on more than a handful of people I needed to have a business model that either could scale up, or that could scale out. Scaling up would mean that I would have to create more stores in more locations, finding more used merchandise and more store managers. Scaling out meant that the marketplace would need to absorb my well trained staff so that I could keep adding fresh first time workers to my employment ranks. Of course this meant that I would always have an inefficient workforce. I also did not want to create a sheltered workshop. I wanted to have an inclusive integrated workplace where people with and without ASD would work together.

I never wanted to be a retail empire building a chain of resale shops. Furthermore, I realized that there could be girls and women who might not be interested in American Girl dolls - really, I know. They might be interested and skilled in software coding or Legos or dog walking. So rather than think of the business as a single doll resale shop, I thought of it as an incubator with a portfolio of businesses for skill building where we would "spin off" people to other businesses.

Last November I launched Yes She Can Inc.

see *Entrepreneur* on page 38

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Finding from page 14

would be fulfilling - which included weeding, watering plants, waiting on people who visited the farm, retrieving eggs, and other farm tasks. This allowed me to build an inventory to go back and begin working with Ethan. Ethan and I began simulation work with borrowed materials from the farm, including:

- Imitating tasks that Ethan would be performing on the farm to familiarize him with the processes and allow him to feel comfortable.
- I took video of the farm to familiarize Ethan with the land, tools, people and area.
- We used narrative-based instruction

by talking through the responsibilities and having Ethan recite them aloud.

- We practiced video self-modeling to record Ethan performing the tasks, such as taking a plant out of a pot and pre-soiling, and I played the video back to Ethan so he would become confident in his abilities.
- With talking photo albums, we inserted photos of the farm into sleeves and put them in the talking photo album to get a sense of the other people employed.

Once the individual is comfortably prepared to being working, the co-workers and employer need to be prepared as well. It is safe to assume that many co-workers

do not understand ASD or what to expect. Through education, co-workers can understand whom the individual is, the best way to communicate with them, and things to do or not do. While some people might be rude or socially ostracizing, managing expectations through education helps prepare all parties involved.

As the person becomes more involved in their employment, there are many positive effects and side effects as a result. In Ethan's case, he made social connections on the farm so that when he went into the community, people recognized him and greeted or spoke with him. This allowed Ethan confidence and comfort within the community to grow. While now receiving a paycheck, Ethan learned how to manage money, use ATM machines, make deposits or withdrawals, and save for things he

wanted. Because of his new job, additional opportunities were generated for Ethan. It is important for individuals to identify these potential effects and take action toward them.

Matching the strengths of an individual to a job opportunity and preparing both the individual and co-workers can set the stage for success and support a person with ASD. Although awareness and implantation of this approach currently is low, I have seen this process effectively executed with the support and help of the individual's family, clinicians and loved ones.

**Name has been altered to protect privacy.*

For more information about Pacific Child and Family Associates, please visit <http://pacificchildandfamily.com>, email info@pacificchild.com, or call (855) 295-3276.

Improving Employment Outcomes for Individuals with Autism

By Marcia Scheiner
Executive Director
Asperger Syndrome Training
and Employment Partnership



Marcia Scheiner

In 2013, a study published by Professor Paul Shattuck, then at Washington University, reported on the outcomes for young adults on the autism spectrum. From Shattuck's study, we learned that just over half (53.4 percent) of the young adults on the autism spectrum surveyed had ever worked for pay outside the home, within the first eight years after leaving high school. Only about one in five (20.9 percent) young adults with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD) worked full-time at a current or most-recent job. According to Shattuck, these employment rates were significantly less than peers with other disabilities. Yet, in spite of this disheartening news, Shattuck found that 35% of young adults diagnosed with an ASD were obtaining some form of post-secondary education. If young adults with an ASD are obtaining greater levels of education than ever previously experienced, why do their employment prospects continue to be so poor?

Many individuals with disabilities look for employment support with their state's Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) agency. For 2012, the Department of Labor's Bu-

reau of Labor Statistics reported that the US had 117,500 Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors, with an expected growth rate in such jobs of 20% over the next ten years. Yet, while the number of people with disabilities (including autism) continues to grow, the number of applicants for state vocational rehabilitation programs is dropping - 579,305 individuals applied in 2011, down 12.3% from the 660,517 people who applied in 2010, and

15.7% below the 687,958 who applied in 2009. In 2011, state VR agencies reported 175,441 cases closed with a successful employment outcome. At the 2012 level of Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors, that is only 1.5 placements a year per counselor.

At the Asperger Syndrome Training & Employment Partnership (ASTEPP), we believe the unemployment crisis in the autism community is the result of:

- Lack of knowledge by employers of the talents and skills individuals with autism can bring to their workplace;
- Concern by employers about the types of accommodations they will need to make for employees with an ASD;
- Uncertainty by employers about how to find and successfully integrate individuals with autism into their organizations; and
- A need to develop a person AND employer focused approach to placing individuals with disabilities into appropriate, competitive employment.

In large Fortune 1000 companies, the hiring decision includes a number of variables:

- Quality of candidates: Could the person being considered meet the job

requirements? How much training would they need, and is the employer capable of providing that training?

- Workforce diversity: Does the candidate bring some form of diversity to the job that will enhance the work environment and work quality of the entire company? Diversity of background, life, and work experiences causes all of us to bring different perspectives to solving the same problem.
- Regulatory/legal compliance: Does the company need to meet certain governmental imposed requirements or guidelines to employ individuals within certain classes (ie: women, minorities, people with disabilities)? Do key customers require the company to meet supplier diversity requirements along these same dimensions? [Note: In 2013, the US Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs implemented a guideline for all federal contractors and subcontractors that their workforce must have 7% of employees be persons with disabilities. A company qualifies as a federal contractor or subcontractor if they have a contract with the Federal government or an agency of the Federal government for \$10,000 or more.]

see Outcomes on page 37

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What Employers Need to Know About Asperger's Syndrome: Accommodating Managers and Professionals on the Spectrum

By **Barbara Bissonette**
Principal
Forward Motion Coaching

There is increasing evidence, albeit anecdotal, that autism is now on the radar screens of employers. Last year, SAP, the giant software company, pledged that in the next few years 1% of its workforce will be individuals on the autism spectrum. The announcement generated widespread publicity. SAP's message was a positive one: utilizing the specialized abilities of autistic individuals.

Also fueling awareness is that so many people today know of someone who is on the autism spectrum. As a human resources director recently told me, "Five years ago, if you mentioned Asperger's Syndrome, I wouldn't know what you were talking about. Now, I can name several people who have it."

Despite this, employers are often unsure of how to manage these employees, particularly the highly capable individuals who are in mid-manager or professional jobs. They are too high-functioning to need the services of an on-site job coach/trainer, yet they often face significant challenges in the workplace. There may be a pattern of repeated job losses, or chronic exhaustion from the stress of making it through another work day.



Barbara Bissonette

The protections provided by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) are vital for those on the autism spectrum. The ADA prohibits employers from discriminating against individuals with disabilities. It requires companies to make reasonable accommodations – modifications that enable

a person to participate in the interviewing process, or to perform his job.

As I have seen repeatedly in my practice, workplace accommodations can mean the difference between a person keeping or losing a job. This is especially true for people with Asperger's Syndrome. For many who are college-educated and in salaried positions, autism is a hidden disability. The characteristic difficulties with interpersonal communication appear to be attitude problems, and are treated accordingly. Minor misunderstandings can quickly escalate into disciplinary actions or firings. Even those who manage to avoid sticky social situations may be ostracized or bullied for being different. The workplace is unforgiving of those who are judged as not being team players.

Sometimes, the most important accommodation to result from a disclosure of Asperger's Syndrome is understanding. It allows managers to reconcile how an employee who is obviously smart and skilled can have so much difficulty interacting with other people.

Now that Asperger's Syndrome is no longer in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM), some individuals wonder whether this understanding is in jeopardy. Most members of the general public – including supervisors and human resources managers – know

very little about the autism spectrum. Myths and stereotypes remain. Asperger's Syndrome tends to be associated with eccentric geniuses who work in high technology or engineering. Autism is associated with Dustin Hoffman's character in the movie *Rain Man*.

Many organizations require that an employee who discloses a disability provide proof of a medical diagnosis. Dave is typical of individuals I work with who are in middle-management or professional jobs. "I'm afraid that if I told my employer that I have autism, it would ruin my career," he said. "I don't know what I'll do if I need an accommodation."

This is an excellent example of why the term Asperger's Syndrome should not go away. It clearly differentiates these individuals from those who are on the Kanner's end of the continuum. The autism spectrum as defined in the DSM-5 is so broad as to be impractical, particularly when defining necessary workplace supports and accommodations.

It is also critical that employers be educated about Asperger's Syndrome. Understanding brings patience and acceptance. This does not mean that employers should tolerate inappropriate or offensive conduct. Addressing performance problems often

see *Accommodating on page 30*

Creating the Path to Employment

By **Jerry Philip**
Program Development Manager
New York Collaborates for Autism

New York Collaborates for Autism (NYCA) creates comprehensive, evidence-based community services to support people living with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) *right now*. In 2011, NYCA turned its attention toward creating employment opportunities for young adults with ASD. As part of its research into adult life, NYCA traveled the country searching for the most promising programs and found Project SEARCH, a unique transition to employment program created by Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center, which provides training and real-life work experience to help youth with significant intellectual disabilities.

With the support of Project SEARCH, NYCA launched Project SEARCH Collaborates for Autism (PSCA) in partnership with NewYork-Presbyterian Hospital, ARC of Westchester, Southern Westchester BOCES (SW BOCES) and Adult Career and Continuing Education Services-Vocational Rehabilitation (ACCES-VR). PSCA uses an autism specific curriculum that was created by NYCA in collaboration with NewYork-Presbyterian Hospital's Center for Autism and



Jerry Philip

the Developing Brain in White Plains. The PSCA curriculum is made up of five central components including student internships, peer mentoring, family involvement, a Business Advisory Council and employment planning. As a whole, the curriculum helps students with ASD learn more than the skills of a job. Spe-

cifically, the curriculum focuses on helping the students with ASD learn the "soft skills" needed to succeed in a work environment. By understanding that the expectations and culture of a work environment are very different from a school environment, these students will more successfully transition from their last year of high school into meaningful employment. Students participate in three internship rotations with the host employer, NewYork-Presbyterian Hospital, and are supported by a team that includes their family, a special education teacher from SW BOCES and a job coach from ARC of Westchester. What started as a pilot program is now in its third academic year.

Kyle Siczewicz, a member of the 2013 graduating class, credits PSCA with helping him discover what skills he excelled at and most enjoyed. "The students are schooled in the very vital skills of resume writing, interviewing, presenting themselves at work, 'water cooler' talk, and appropriate social behavior in an office setting," reports Kyle's mother. After his successful completion of the PSCA program, Kyle used these skills to get a job at Jackson Lewis, a prominent law firm located in White Plains, NY.

Kyle quickly became a vital member of the Jackson Lewis team. He first learned to work with new software for electronic filing and used his organiza-

tional skills to sort and maintain physical files to aid in the efficiency of the office. Over the past several months, Kyle has been given more responsibility within the office and continues to learn new skills that he will be able to apply to future jobs.

In addition to the work within the law firm, Kyle's employment has allowed him to become more independent on a daily basis. Kyle now commutes by himself to work on the train and uses his own hard earned money to purchase his tickets, something his mother Ellen used to do with him every day. According to Kyle, "I like how I've become more independent, I like how I'm getting more involved in the world, and I absolutely enjoy having the opportunity to do things more on my own." Kyle's mother sees the immense benefits that employment has had in Kyle's life. She reports that, "Working at the law firm has given purpose to Kyle's daily life; a routine and structure that we all need to feel that we are contributing."

The PSCA program empowers people with ASD to acquire competitive, transferable and marketable job skills, as well as to gain increased independence, confidence and self-esteem. Kyle and his mother credit PSCA with his successful transition from high school to employment.

see *Path on page 31*

Creating a Win-Win When Hiring People with Autism: How One Small Company Made it Work

By Patricia Rowan, LMSW
Consultant and Advocate
Kid's Connection

Awave of high school and college graduates with talent, ability, and a tremendous capacity to contribute are hitting the job market but they are not getting hired. Recent statistics show that 75% of people with autism spectrum disorders are either unemployed or under employed. Many of those that are working are performing in menial jobs that do not reflect their talents and skills.

As a licensed social worker for the past 20 plus years, I have served a niche area working with teens and young adults on the autism spectrum. My focus is on preparation for transition, career counseling, and job coaching as they struggle to move forward with their lives post-graduation. Many have high school diplomas, college degrees, and some graduate degrees. Irrespective of their educational background, work can be elusive.

For people with AS or high functioning autism, a large part of the problem in getting hired is the lack of understanding on the part of the employer as to who they are and what they can offer. These challenges affect the interview process and when competing for a given position, the person



Patricia Rowan, LMSW

with ASD inevitably loses.

My goal was to find a way to level the playing field for these individuals by finding a company that, if given the appropriate supports, was willing to learn the advantages of employing these young adults, creating a win/win for both.

Rowan Document Solutions is a small boutique company servicing private practitioners, medical groups, and hospitals by imaging medical reports. Imaging of medical documents requires preparing the charts to go into the scanners. Charts are meticulously gone through to prepare them for the scanning process. There is a data entry requirement at the beginning and end of this process. It is important to note at this time that this company is run by my son Greg Rowan, who through his association with myself and my work, along with volunteer activities, was no stranger to working with people with disabilities. The story of how this company hired and retained the services of a handful of people with ASD to its financial benefit began with educating the employer.

Education

Employers tend to fear the unknown. If they lack experience in a particular area, they will be wary of it. If they have never encountered people with cognitive differences, they will be nervous about hiring them.

Step 1 - Break down the barriers of fear and ignorance; a whole new labor pool is opened up to them. With education and a solid support strategy, employers are taught the benefits of hiring people

with strong personal characteristics like reliability, honesty, and loyalty as well as their creativity, technical proficiency, and attention to detail. These attributes equate to positive financial gains to businesses. Other advantages to hiring people with disabilities are wage subsidy programs, tax incentives, and social marketing benefits.

“Social marketing is a relatively new idea in the corporate world. Corporations are recognizing that monetary- and voluntary-based contributions that support increased employability of people with disabilities make good marketing practice” (Finding Work That Works for People With AS, Gail Hawkins. Jessica Kingsley Press, 2004).

Step 2 - After the employer has a better understanding of the advantages of hiring people with ASD, a job coach or professional promoting employment meets with the supervisors for training. These are the people who will be on the front lines working directly with the individual. They are educated about the strengths and challenges of the individual, and have their questions and concerns addressed. An ongoing, open communication for troubleshooting between the job coach, supervisors, and the employee

see *Win-Win* on page 33

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DR. SERENA WIEDER
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the DIR®/Floortime™ Model

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renowned speaker, and leading
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Founder of The Hallowell Centers
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Smart Pens, Tablets, and Word Prediction Software: Utilizing Technology for High School and College Students

By Casey Schmalacker, BA
and Samantha Feinman, MEd, TSSH
New Frontiers in Learning

As we move through this digital age, students in high school and college are increasingly using technology as a mechanism to support learning. Technology can be used in a multitude of ways, ranging from electronic organizational systems and digital reminders to supporting more complex academic tasks through the use of computer software. Assistive technology, specifically, has been infused into the daily schedules of students with disabilities to support the removal of learning barriers that some individuals may face. Among students utilizing assistive technology to improve academic learning, high school and college students diagnosed with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) in particular have increasingly incorporated the use of technology into the learning environment.

Assistive technology consists of services and devices that provide equal education opportunities to students with disabilities by providing supports that focus on individual-specific needs. Assistive technology has been used to improve skills in areas such as note-taking, reading comprehension, and expository and narrative writing. Such



Casey Schmalacker, BA

tasks are integral to the academic experience, in that a student's ability to excel in these areas most often is directly related to their level of success. This article will discuss why assistive technology is necessary for students with ASD transitioning from high school to college, as well as outline three forms of effective assistive technol-



Samantha Feinman, MEd, TSSH

ogy, and how one would incorporate such technology into the learning environment.

Research has demonstrated that the use of computers has resulted in the improvement of the skills of students with ASD in a variety of different areas such as attention, fine motor, and generalization (Habash, 2005). Improvement of skills is

many times the desirable goal, and therefore technology can act as a means to accommodating specific deficits that prevent goal attainment.

In order to achieve success in the high school and college arenas, students need to be able to access supports to successfully comprehend large amounts of reading material and class lecture and discussion, as well as write at a much more independent and sophisticated level. When students demonstrate weaknesses in these areas, they are unable to demonstrate their maximum potential, and their work may become an inaccurate representation of their true capabilities. Assistive technology can begin to bridge the gap between student obstacles and the execution of their academic responsibilities.

Developing strategies and systems for use with assistive technology is important to master during high school so students can effectively deploy the technologies at the college level. The college work environment has a few fundamental differences from high school that can increase the difficulty level, especially for students with ASD. Class time at universities is devoted to many more lectures, requiring vigorous note-taking on course content that, many times, is important to know for exams,

see *Technology on page 41*

Cut Out for Him: A Father on His Son's Employment Future

By Jeff Stimpson
Journalist

My 15-year-old son Alex (diagnosed PDD-NOS) goes to a special-needs school where some students are old enough to work. A few years ago Alex's teacher told me about when she approached a local thrift shop about students volunteering there.

"We don't hire the handicapped," the clerk said.

"In the first place," said Alex's teacher, "I'm asking about volunteering for no pay. In the second place, we don't use that term anymore."

"Well whatever you call them," the clerk replied, "we don't hire them."

Too bad. In supermarkets Alex turns all the cans on the shelf so the labels face straight out. He empties our dishwasher in the morning. He sets holiday dinner tables and leaves the handles of all the coffee cups at precisely the same angle.

"Alex," I ask as he tucks in the sheets at the foot of his bed, "would you like a job?" I expect him to parrot back, "Like a job?"

"A job to do," he says, tucking.

Alex has his work cut out for him. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that the unemployment rate for American adults with disabilities was 13.3% at the beginning of this year, compared with 6.8% for adults without disabilities. Ac-



Jeff Stimpson

cording to a study in the September 2013 *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, young adults with an ASD have more trouble transitioning into employment than their peers with different disabilities ([www.jaacap.com/article/S0890-8567\(13\)00377-8/abstract](http://www.jaacap.com/article/S0890-8567(13)00377-8/abstract)). The study also found that only half (53%) of young adults with an ASD ever work for pay outside their home in the first eight years after high school – the lowest rate

among disability groups.

My friend Jennifer tells me her son started as a cart attendant at a local Target; after three years they added "sales floor" to his cart duties. "He also straightens the store, stocking and fronting items," she emails. Jennifer advises parents seeking employment for kids with ASDs to connect with local stores, making introductions early with businesses that would accept a person with a disability – "really 'accept,' not just legally accept," she says.

Jennifer's son has also held some "less-than-perfect" jobs before Target, she stresses, "So stay positive and keep pushing."

Okay. "If Alex worked here," I tell the lady at the wine store, "he'd have the labels of all the bottles facing the same way in about an hour." She laughs. I don't add that I also think he'd dash out the back door of the store long before that hour was up. Though he'd probably stop short of smashing fine Chardonnay on the floor, I bet he would yank himself away from his supervisor and lunge off crying, "Awww, iPad..."

I wish I pushed Alex more. The dishwasher is a dawn routine now, true, yet often simply having him sweep crumbs just slips my mind. He watches too much Elmo on his iPad; too often I let him alone. I'm not together enough to be Alex's dad, not smart enough for this job.

I look for help on his Individualized Education Program:

- "To prepare for volunteer clerical work at an adult day program, Alex would benefit from developing vocational skills through work-based projects and in-school jobs and having more opportunities to develop initiation skills when speaking to staff and peers."
- "Working more independently will be addressed during his in-school job making copies for staff independently for 20 minutes."
- "Alex displays a high interest in going on the computer." Can't argue with that (see "Elmo"). His Aunt Julie suggests we open an email account for Alex. Then she could write to him and he could send out resumes.
- "Alex will receive ongoing instruction and opportunities to practice writing personal information on job applications."
- "Alex will receive instruction and have opportunities in the community to practice using laundry machines and learning how to fold laundry." Great idea even if he never gets a job.
- "Alex responds very well to verbal praise." Also great, except:

see *Future on page 40*

Disclosing an ASD Diagnosis: There is Another Option

By Kate Palmer, MA, CCP
and Lindsey Pfundstein, BA, QMHP
GRASP

You are on the spectrum and searching for jobs. You've prepared your resume, practiced interview skills, written cover letters, applied for jobs. You also might have considered whether or not to disclose your diagnosis. If you were diagnosed as a child, then, growing up everyone around you already knew you were on the spectrum; telling new people can be difficult. Does your employer need to know?

You've worked at a job for a while and have had some trouble navigating workplace politics. Recently you've read about Autism Spectrum Disorders and decided to pursue a diagnosis. You were then diagnosed with an ASD. What next? Do you share the diagnosis with your employer and colleagues?

You're a parent of a young adult with an ASD and you've been assisting your daughter/son prepare for a job. You know that you cannot attend a job interview with your young adult child, but you want to make sure that she/he is able to convey her/his challenges to her/his new employers. How do you help?

The Dilemma

Now, consider a subject you know nothing



Lindsey Pfundstein, BA, QMHP, with Kate Palmer, MA, CCP

about. For example, I know nothing about surfing. If a surfer came up to me and began describing the names of particular surf moves, I would not understand what the surfer was talking about. This would make it considerably difficult to have a conversation or to communicate without a lesson in surfing. Next, imagine you have just told your boss or potential employer

you have an ASD, a subject with which they are not familiar. Although Aspergers, Autism, PDD, Spectrum, ASD, Aspies, and Spectrumites are familiar jargon to most in the Autism Spectrum Community, these terms hold no concrete meaning to those outside that are not educated on the subject. They are now no closer to knowing or understanding you or what ASD is

and how it affects your ability to work effectively and efficiently.

Self-Advocacy

The previous illustrations describe a lack of *Common Ground*. Common Ground means that the individuals in the discussion share the similar knowledge and experiences necessary for mutual understanding (Clark & Van Der Wege, 2002). If the people in the conversation do not share similar background understanding, as is the case with my awareness of surfing lingo, clear communication is not possible. So, instead of disclosing an ASD diagnosis with an employer or potential employer, who may or may not be familiar with the topic, consider finding the Common Ground.

In the workplace, the goal for both employers and employees is a successful, smooth operating business. In order to achieve this, employers need their employees to be as efficient as possible. As an individual with ASD, some challenges may make it more difficult to be the most productive on the job. This can be a stressful and anxiety producing situation. How does someone convey those challenges without having to disclose a diagnosis, which, as previously described, may not necessarily solve the issue?

In order for someone to convey her/his

see *Disclosing on page 42*

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Walking a Tightrope of Conflicting Expectations

By Matthew J. Ratz, MEd
Vocational Trainer

In my two professional roles—as an adjunct professor of English composition at a local community college and as a vocational trainer and curriculum developer for adults with autism—I encounter adults at all levels of job readiness. Many of the students in my English composition classes are working adults who are seeking advancement through education; they are sacrificing their time, their money, and their personal lives to secure credentials for professional growth. Many of the adult students who take classes where I teach would prefer *not* to work, but they must. On the other hand, many of the adults with autism for whom I develop training hold part-time, seasonal, or itinerant jobs. Many of the individuals supported at the center where I am employed would prefer *to* work full-time, but they cannot.

To be frank, students enrolled in colleges and universities have, for the most part, the constitutions and the perseverance to land on their feet regardless of the economies they face. Adults with developmental disabilities, on the other hand, need an extra “boost” in order to compete in a highly-competitive, market-driven economy. The contrasting worlds of employment for college graduates vis-à-vis adults with autism represent an impossibly-complex chasm that service providers strive to bridge.



Matthew J. Ratz, MEd

resent an impossibly-complex chasm that service providers strive to bridge.

Straddling these two worlds, I am able to see first-hand how the job market both drives and stalls a person’s opportunities. Individuals—both typically-developed and those with disabilities—who are able and willing to work are, at times, unable to do so; independent adults who don’t want to work—for whatever reason—*must* in order

to keep food in their mouths and roofs over their heads. Straddling these two worlds also helps me see the labyrinth on both sides of the employment market; I see the plight of job seekers and I see the challenge for hiring managers, both of whom need special skills to navigate the maze. Furthermore, as someone committed to advancing opportunities for adults with autism, I see how hard it is to help this group compete with the formally-educated and highly-skilled college graduates who are flooding the job market and are seeking, whether justly or mistakenly, the same types of jobs.

The reality is this: adults with autism and college graduates *should not need to compete* for the same jobs. There is a vast gap between these two parties’ skillsets. The skills that the average college graduate brings to a career are markedly different from the skills brought to bear by adults with autism; however, each can contribute to a workplace in meaningful ways if given the chance.

About My College Students

The students in the English composition classroom at our local community college fall along a wide spectrum themselves. Some of them are recent high school graduates, aged 18 or 19, but most are older adults returning to school. They are returning to school because they believe

getting a formal education will make the difference between working in low-skilled, low-paid labor and securing a high-skilled, well-paying job. Having worked on both sides of the employment field—the low-skilled and the high-skilled—myself, and being in a position, now, that allows me to screen applicants’ resumes and interview potential new-hires, I try as best as I can to give sound, prescient advice about the job search and about one’s early career.

The employment landscape has changed dramatically since my own teachers and counselors sought employment decades ago. According to a Rutgers University study, only 50% of the Bachelor’s degree holding graduates from the class of 2011 secured full-time employment upon graduation. With record unemployment, a glut of applicants, and a dearth of entry-level jobs, the job market is really—to borrow a realtors’ term—a “buyer’s market” where employers have their picks and can choose the best, most-able applicants for each position.

The Skills Hiring Managers Seek

A 2013 survey from the National Association of Colleges and Employers ranked the top-ten skills hiring managers seek for their new hires. Seven “soft skills” surpass any job-specific, technical abilities on this list; these “soft skills” include the ability to

see Expectations on page 39

Grandchild from page 21

with their enigmatic grandson, to play checkers and make meatballs and teach woodworking.

To make communication matters even more interesting, my husband Joe’s parents have the unusual habit of referring to themselves in a directive or comment. For example, say Joe’s father is asking Jack to close the door. He’ll say to Jack, “Hey, close the door, okay Grandpa?” (Again: I do not even have autism and *this confuses me*.) For years, Jack just looked at them blankly and walked away.

I can’t say there was a turning point exactly - a light bulb moment when Grandma and Grandpa at last understood the intricacies of the spectrum disorder and became autism whisperers - but I can say they never gave up in their pursuit to understand this sandy-haired boy.

I remember one time they spent the afternoon at our house. It was late fall and chilly out, and we were all outside on the play set, brown leaves crunching underfoot. Except for Jack. He would not leave the house, but stayed just inside the kitchen, watching everyone through the window like an interloper on the wrong side of the glass.

Every ten minutes or so, either Grandma or Grandpa would walk inside to try and coax him outside, to swing high on the swings and slide fast down the slide. I bet they tried at least a dozen times, until at last Jack emerged - wearing neither shoes nor a jacket.

I saw Joe’s mother look him over and start to say, “Jack you need a jacket, it’s

cold...” before Joe interrupted, “Let it go, Mom. He’s here, he came out.”

Finally, when he was about six, it was Jack’s turn to spend the night in their cozy one-story ranch, his turn to gently drift off as his grandmother sang Italian lullabies in the darkened bedroom. And once he was asleep, Joe’s mother and father kept a silent vigil over him all night long - watching and waiting in case he woke up and slipped out the door, even though his days of wandering were behind him.

Now Jack is nine. Sometimes we go to Joe’s parents for Sunday dinner, and he will march up to Joe’s mother in the middle of the meal with a yellow pear in his hand and wordlessly thrust it at her. Joe and I object and protest; *Jack Grandma isn’t done eating yet let her finish*. But every time, she *shushes* us and bends closer to him, whispering for him to hand her the ripe fruit. She picks up her knife and peels it, handing him section after section while he hovers at her elbow.

Over the years they have figured one another out. Jack learned to *close the door*; *Grandpa* and *Grandma* understands that Jack will wear a jacket when he’s cold. He stays there regularly.

If I stopped right here, if I told the grandfather at Barnes and Noble this collection of stories, my message would have been obvious and cliché: when your grandchild has autism you need accept what you can’t change and love them for who they are and never give up and blah blah blah.

But it still would have been meaningless and unfinished. Because I have another

memory that keeps popping up in my subconscious, a memory that somehow seems important, integral.

We were at my sister-in-law’s house just outside of Boston for a birthday party. Jack was about three, and over the course of the afternoon he and two-year old Charlie were at each other again and again, fighting and kicking. I don’t even remember why, but I think it had something to do with a deflating *balloon*. I vaguely recall them grabbing and snatching and shrieking for it as the white circle drifted around the crowded kitchen.

I do remember I was hot and I do remember I was irritated. I remember I was tired of hearing my two boys screech and scratch at each other, tired of separating them again and again. Finally, Joe put Jack in a timeout in the living room and instructed him to stay there.

Alone, he sat in the other room, screaming and crying as the rest of us shifted nervously in our chairs. Then all at once Joe’s mother got up, and walked determinedly over to where Jack sat. She picked him up and cradled him against her shoulder. When Joe protested, she looked up at her six-foot tall son and said firmly, “Enough. We are done with this.”

Both Joe and I were outraged. Outraged that she interfered, outraged with one another, outraged with a son we could not figure out. On the hour-long car ride back to New Hampshire we niggled and argued, bickering about timeouts and in-laws and how to handle children who threw tantrums.

But sitting at my desk now, six years later, I finally understand what my mother-in-

law had figured out during that party. She didn’t know the terminology for sensory integration or regulation or self-stimulation, but she recognized a small boy who was overwhelmed and tired and sad. She didn’t need sophisticated language to diagnose two parents who were on the verge of a breakdown.

With this in mind, I would like to tell all of the grandparents this:

Yes, there are unfamiliar terms like joint attention and IEP and *theory of mind*, but at the end of the day, it’s just you and this child. Do not be afraid. Deep down you already know these phrases/behaviors; you know when a child has had enough.

When your grandchild has autism, sometimes you’ll need to forgo the jacket.

Yes, you’ll need to accept what you can’t change and love them for who they are, but when your grandchild has autism, never forget that you have your own message to share and lessons to teach. Sing the lullabies and make the meatballs.

Autism has a lot of heartbreak, but many rewards. These gifts can be hard to see and easy to miss; some days it’s just a quick *hug* goodbye, a mouthful of ziti at dinner, a smile across the table.

Some days, it may look like nothing more than a small boy standing next to you with his palm outstretched, waiting for his slice of a juicy yellow pear.

“What Color Is Monday?” is available on Amazon.com and BarnesandNoble.com. You can also follow Carrie on her weekly blog: www.WhatColorIsMonday.com and Facebook.com/WhatColorIsMonday.

Integrating Special Interests and Passions for Successful Employment

By Emily Brooks
Journalist with ASD

As the 1 in 88 age out of the public school system in the US, autism service providers and organizations are questioning how to best meet the workplace needs of adults of all ages with autism spectrum disorders. As a journalist diagnosed on the autism spectrum myself, I have had my fair share of both failure and success in my jobs. One factor that made my jobs work better were when they involved my special interest. Do special interest-focused jobs motivate other adults on the spectrum, too?

With this question in mind, I interviewed 24 other adults with ASD from the US as well as Canada, the UK, Australia, and Europe. This article explores special interest-focused jobs for adults on the spectrum and their role in helping some individuals on the spectrum to find meaningful and enjoyable careers. I cover participants' interests within and beyond technology fields, job creation from personal passions, and success in careers that value hyper-focus, "monologuing," and specialized knowledge.

As an analytical, highly-knowledgeable person who is curious and self-motivated to explore topics of interest, Julia has qualities any employer would envy. Yet the United Kingdom 31-year-old struggles



Emily Brooks

with finding and keeping work. One of 24 adults with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) from around the globe that were interviewed, Julia faces a conundrum all-too-common for employees on the spectrum.

Finding appropriate jobs for people with ASD is a pressing concern. "Entry level" jobs may prove difficult, discouraging us from working. Betina from Denmark told

me one job "that did not fit my traits" was "being an assistant in institutions," something the 59-year-old has tried several times. "I always end up being worn out and worse functioning, little by little, and getting sacked or having a nervous breakdown."

79% of those I interviewed experienced undue difficulties in finding, handling, or keeping their jobs. These individuals were also smart, talented, and passionate. Diagnosed with ASD myself, I know how it feels to fail in the workplace. Yet with my passions at the heart of my job, I am motivated and successful. With a little creativity, any "special interest" (the intense passion for specific, often-unusual subjects associated with autism) can become a career and yield an energetic and happy workforce out of those currently struggling in interpersonal, skill-heavy and unfulfilling jobs.

Instead of giving up, Betina followed her special interests. "My true wish would be to have all the time in the world for music, arts, research, writing, and teaching," she shared. Because of her intense focus in these areas, Betina both excelled at and enjoyed her job as a music and art adult educator. And the others at her workplace recognized her abilities. "I was totally absorbed day and night and was regarded as a good teacher," she explained.

Not Just Technology

The latest workplace diversity model en-

lists employees with autism for computer programming, data entry, and other information technology tasks. Recruiters might fawn over 39-year-old Camille, a Canadian whose dream job is "data modeling or data analysis," or Carsten, a 30-year-old from Denmark, who likes his current work maintaining agricultural databases and running computer coding classes for coworkers.

Companies must not generalize that everybody with autism is naturally adept at IT. For many with ASD, talents in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics come from intensive interests, not just intrinsic skills. Camille's special interests include databases, languages, symbols, and electronics, so it makes sense that she would rock a data analysis-based position. Carsten's special interests are information technology and games. No wonder he adores what he does.

Creating Jobs from Interests

The ocean of abilities and interests within the autism community reminds service providers to respect individuality during job coaching. What better way to personalize careers than fusing special interests and imagination?

"I know my stuff when it comes to kids programs and books. I am serious," said Emma. The 28-year-old Canadian who

see *Integrating on page 40*

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DAYS/HOURS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • M-F, 10-4 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • M-F, 10-4 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • M-F, 10-4 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • W & F, 12-3
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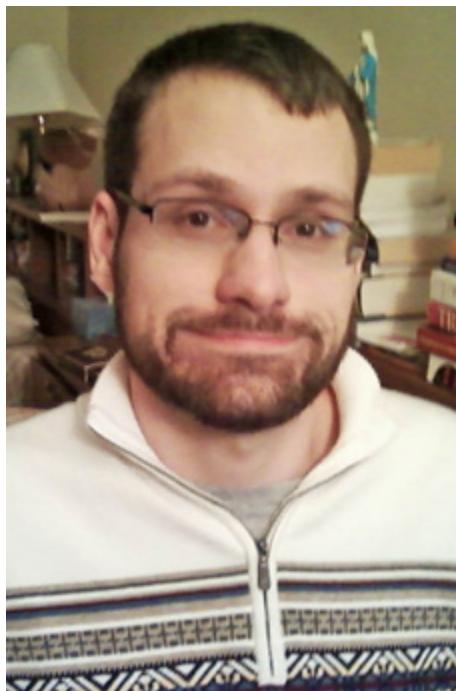
How (and How Not) to Work with Employees with Autism or Asperger Syndrome

By Daniel Crofts, MA
Day Habilitation Assistant
Genesee County Chapter NYSARC

Imagine that you are a young person with Asperger Syndrome. You leave home and go off to college. Happily, you find that your new school is quite able to accommodate your needs (provided you advocate for yourself, of course). Whether it is an alternative location and extra time for testing, a note-taker in class, or another such support, you will receive whatever you need in order to be successful.

Now fast forward a few more years. The game has changed. School's over, and you have a job. The accommodations that helped you have a fair shot at success in the world of academia are no longer available. And whereas in college work and time management were as simple as making a list of what needed to get done, prioritizing each item appropriately, noting how much time you had for each assignment, and organizing your workload accordingly, you soon enough discover that it's not quite that simple in the workplace.

Whether it is the subtleties of office communication, the complexity of the work and how it fits into the whole organizational scheme of things, or, in many cases, the rapid pace, you find that the professional



Daniel Crofts, MA

world does not so nicely suit your need for clear, manageable, unambiguous structure.

And perhaps worst of all, while there is always a learning curve in the workplace, it seems the same learning curve that applied in school does not apply here. You are expected to meet the organization's standards

on its terms and within its timeframe, not your own.

To be fair, schools and colleges have had the benefit of many years' preparation and training in working with autism and other disabilities. Businesses and other professional settings have not been similarly equipped. Hopefully, I can offer a few valuable insights in this regard.

The challenges the workplace presents to someone with Asperger Syndrome or any other form of so-called "high functioning" autism are very much linked to the challenges facing the average 21st century employee. First, the typical worker is not only expected to meet the concrete expectations of his/her job, but is held responsible for a whole host of unwritten, unspoken rules that are sometimes too subtle to take immediate note of (a specific type of body language at a meeting, for instance).

Many employees say that they would gladly and ably comply with these expectations if they were made clear in advance. Most employers, however, feel that they shouldn't have to do this...people should just know.

Secondly, it sometimes seems that employers pay too little attention to what their employees do right. I can understand where the employers are coming from on this: "We are all adults here. This is your job. You shouldn't need a pat on the back

whenever you do something right."

But the reverse is not true. The minute you are doing something wrong, the warnings and reprimands come. Understandably, morale tends to suffer from this approach.

Finally – and this is not universal, though it is common enough – there is the lightning-quick pace of a modern workplace that strives for efficiency and constant progress. An appreciable quantity of output is expected, all of which requires great care and attention to detail...and it all has to get done posthaste. Whatever it is, if it wasn't done yesterday, it wasn't done quickly enough.

Please don't misunderstand me – this is not an indictment of employers. They are caught in the unfortunate realities of the modern workplace just like everyone else. But I believe that we, as a society, have to take these issues into consideration for the sake of everyone involved, employers included.

For a lot of people with autism spectrum disorders (ASDs), many of the contemporary workforce's expectations are patently unrealistic. Through no fault of their own, people on the autism spectrum can take longer to mentally process information... whether conveyed via written communication, verbally, or otherwise. A so-called

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Accommodating from page 24

requires workplace accommodations and behavioral changes by the employee.

Mark's supervisor explicitly explained his priorities, helped him develop check lists for tasks, and moved him to a cubicle in a quiet location. However, Mark persisted in disrupting others. He would repeatedly ask a question he knew the answer to ("To double check myself," he explained). If he needed to speak with a co-worker who was in a meeting, he would hover outside the conference room. Colleagues would receive four and five emails per hour inquiring when they would hand over assignments. His boss said that if these behaviors didn't stop, immediately and permanently, he would be fired.

Mark told his supervisor that he was working with an Asperger's specialist on his interpersonal skills. Impressed by his commitment, she agreed to speak with me. Once she understood that his actions were not due to rudeness or the willful disregard of her instructions, she was willing to give him another chance. We identified the specific behaviors that Mark needed to change. I reassured her that she would not hurt Mark's feelings by confronting problem behaviors directly. She learned to be more specific and concrete when giving him feedback. Rather than saying, "Everyone can hear you," she would say, "You need to lower your voice."

In the coaching sessions, Mark learned to pay closer attention to the nonverbal signals co-workers gave when they did not want to be interrupted. He found ways to better manage his anxiety, and stopped repeating questions and sending multiple

emails about the same topic. We established rules and procedures for handling legitimate questions, behavior in staff meetings, and thinking through options instead of impulsively reacting to problems. Mark was amazed that he could control how other people perceived him by changing the way he acted.

Over the next few months, Mark's skills and his relationships with co-workers steadily improved. His supervisor acknowledged the change. A year later, he was given a promotion.

Employers who have a grasp of Aspergian strengths and challenges are in a better position to match jobs to the abilities of an employee. It is not always easy for Aspergians to determine the suitability of a position that they have not held previously.

Karen discovered this after being promoted from assistant archivist to manager. She had been employed at the company for over three years, and disclosed her Asperger's Syndrome a few months after she started.

In the new role, Karen was involved in creating a complex database for archiving data. Just three months after the promotion, Karen was placed on probation. Her supervisor complained that she made too many errors, and that critical tasks were not completed on time.

The manager's job required that Karen attended several staff meetings per week. Being around others made her anxious. She had trouble simultaneously listening and writing, and did not take notes at meetings. She forgot what she heard, and left meetings unsure of what she was expected to do. Karen was embarrassed to learn, from her boss, that a particular spreadsheet

was a critical component of the archiving project. "I don't know what needs to be done, or why it's important," she said.

Karen had been promoted into an executive function nightmare. Still, she believed that with modifications she could meet performance expectations. She presented the following accommodation requests to her supervisor and a human resources representative:

- Twice weekly meetings with her supervisor to discuss priorities, the best way to handle tasks, and how to be more efficient
- Explanations of the big picture to clarify why she was performing certain tasks
- Assignments given in writing (not verbally)
- Ability to review meeting notes taken by a colleague
- Instruction from a co-worker on how to organize files and her work space

In addition, Karen agreed to create a monthly project schedule, a weekly to-do list, and check lists for multi-step tasks and review these with her supervisor.

After three weeks, Karen's supervisor decided that Karen could not manage the core responsibilities of the job. "At the manager level," she explained, "you need to handle most of these tasks independently." Karen was demoted to her previous position of assistant archivist.

Karen succeeded in the assistant job because it was structured, and there was

little pressure. Intriguingly, one of the few things she didn't like about it was a scheduled lunch break. She mentioned several times that what she really liked about being a manager was going to lunch when she wanted.

Had her employer understood more about why the manager's role *could* be quite challenging, Karen could have been evaluated differently. Had she been able to shadow the former manager (who himself was promoted), and received more explicit examples of what the responsibilities were, she might have realized that it was not a good fit. Or, if she accepted the job, she could have requested accommodations from the start.

A valuable resource for professionals and employers is the Job Accommodation Network (JAN; <http://askjan.org>), a service of the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy. Its website offers a wealth of information about the Americans with Disabilities Act, including guides with accommodation ideas for various disabilities.

Barbara Bissonnette is the Principal of Forward Motion Coaching (www.ForwardMotion.info). To request a free copy of *The Employer's Guide to Asperger's Syndrome*, send an email to Barbara@ForwardMotion.info. Barbara specializes in career development coaching for individuals with Asperger's Syndrome and provides training to organizations. She is the author of the award-winning *Complete Guide to Getting a Job for People with Asperger's Syndrome and the Asperger's Syndrome Workplace Survival Guide: A Neurotypical's Secrets for Success*.

The Impact of Expressive, Receptive, and Pragmatic Language Deficits in the Workplace

By Tamara Sterling, MS, CCC-SLP, TSSLD
Speech-Language Pathologist

Most individuals with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) have vocational strengths and are increasingly being hired by small businesses and corporate chains. ASD, by definition, is characterized by communication deficits. Once hired, these deficits present as challenges for individuals with ASD. Specifically, their expressive, receptive, and pragmatic language deficits can be barriers to effective job performance. Employers who are made aware of these language deficits can provide accommodations and staff trainings that make employment adjustments easier for individuals with ASD.

Expressive language disorder impacts job performance. It is a communication disorder that affects the output of language and its indicators vary from person to person. Some individuals with ASD can have large vocabularies and adequate verbal skills (but struggle with using language in meaningful ways), while others have impaired verbal skills. A person with ASD processes language in a different way than a person who is neurotypical. This affects the way that they produce spoken and written language. Their brains function in



Tamara Sterling, MS, CCC-SLP, TSSLD

atypical ways. The challenges and breakdowns arise in forming and expressing ideas, connecting words to their represented thoughts, and in processing language. Employees with ASD often demonstrate difficulties with word order, forming sim-

ple and complex utterances, word endings, using plurals, verb tense, and other grammatical aspects when they are engaged in a conversation or when they compose an email or other written documents. Semantics is also a barrier in spoken and written communication. Individuals with ASD are observed to have word finding and word meaning difficulties. They can be described as “talking in circles” and being unable to put words together to come to a point. People with ASD may not have the right words or enough words in their repertoire to ask and answer questions. They may use vague and non-specific words such as “thing” or “that” thereby making their intended meaning unclear to their employers, coworkers, and customers. This disconnection between words and ideas leads to communication breakdowns. It then makes individuals with ASD feel frustrated because they may know the thought, idea, or feeling that they want to communicate, but they find it hard to express it. Some employees with ASD are nonverbal and communicate by using American Sign Language (ASL). They have barriers in communicating because employers, coworkers, and customers may not know ASL thereby creating a communication breakdown.

Employees with ASD present with challenges in understanding spoken and written language. Difficulty understanding

language is a receptive language disorder and it impacts job performance. Comprehension of spoken and written language is fundamental in the workplace. Understanding language is a complex undertaking. It requires individuals to attend, process language, and know word meanings. It is important that employers and coworkers do not misread employees with ASD. They may appear to not be listening and to be uninterested in what is being said during meetings and throughout the work day. Employers and coworkers should look beyond what they observe and realize that employees with ASD present with impairments in attending, processing language, and knowing word meanings. This makes it difficult to keep up with the demands of spoken and written language. The ability to effectively follow directions is essential in the workplace. It requires working memory and processing skills. When employees with ASD are given verbal and written directions to complete a task, they have to store the task requirements into short term memory, process the task sequence, and then interpret and execute the task requirements. Employees with ASD are observed to struggle with following directions. In the workplace, it should be recognized that when employees with ASD do not respond

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government complex and a banking center which provided internships sites “in high need, high turnover positions.” Students assigned to the vocational training condition had an 87.5% employment rate after graduation from high school. Students assigned to the control group or “business as usual” condition had a 6.25% employment rate.

NYIT’s VIP is a three year process which requires an integrated approach of independent living, social and vocational skills training. VIP starts students out with the assumption that there is a place for everyone in the workforce - but it takes more than work skills to be successful. The first year introduces the students to the career fields that are available and then evaluates their work readiness. A student can be technically skilled, but not be able to manage their time or personal hygiene. Social skills training are in place for the students to learn effective communication and behavior with peers, coworkers and supervisors.

So, how does one find these “ideal” workplaces? According to an article in the

New York Daily News, adults with ASD “are becoming sought-after recruits at a handful of companies where their intense focus, attention to detail and ability to think differently is valued.” (June 4, 2013). Two of those industries include software producers and home financing companies, two areas where we have found success with our interns.

The “green technology” fields are starting to open and are an attractive option for people on the spectrum. In 2009, AHRC in Nassau County, NY, established this program to provide electronics recycling for the metro-NY area. The initial idea was to provide employment for the developmentally disabled and to also be competitive in this growing “green” industry. E-Works™ provides recycling, refurbishment and resale primarily in office electronics like computers, monitors, servers, scanners, copiers, etc. and also any other electronics like TVs, cell phones and video equipment. This company provides multi-level job opportunities including transport, warehousing, auditing, erasing data, repairing, disassembling, sorting and shredding. In addition, they have their own educational

and training center where they teach potential employees the skills needed to go right into the job.

Work is not just a paycheck; it is part of our identity and an essential part of a fulfilling and independent life. Comprehensive vocational training along with finding the right employer-worker match provides a pathway to this goal.

Terri White, MPS, is the Director of Vocational Services at New York Institute of Technology Vocational Independence Program. The Vocational Independence Program is a U.S. Department of Education approved Comprehensive Transition and Postsecondary (CTP) Program. Please visit www.nyit.edu/vip for more information.

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Path from page 24

Kyle explains, “To be honest, I can say that it was a real improvement on my life. Prior to PSCA, I did not feel as involved in the world as much. Once I joined, I was able to

expand [my capabilities].”

Ellen is hopeful and confident that her son’s intelligence and determination will change the way people view individuals with ASD. She states, “What I am really hoping for now is that other people,

whether it is his co-workers, the train conductor, or the staff at the coffee shop, see him and other people with ASD differently. Or maybe as just the same.” She explains, “As parents of ASD children, we learn very quickly which programs are of

value, and PSCA is one of them.”

To learn more about New York Collaborates for Autism or Project SEARCH Collaborates for Autism please visit www.NYC4A.org or call 212-759-3775.

Interview from page 6

The first are open-ended, like "Tell me about yourself" or "Why should I hire you." The latter are meant to exclude you from the position. For example: "Are you willing to travel?" or "What are your salary requirements?" If you say you are not willing to travel, they'll automatically disqualify you.

Do Your Research

Research will help you to prepare for the interviewer's questions by gathering important information about the industry, company, salary, and position. The power of knowledge bestows confidence - something you'll need to succeed in interviews. Find out about their needs and goals. What are they looking for in an ideal employee? Then, present yourself as a problem solver.

By researching the company you are applying to and similar company websites, you can find out what they are looking for and be better aware of experiences you have had that qualify you for this position. Researching similar positions will also give you salary information. You'll be better informed about the market value of the skills and training that you bring to the table. This will help you maintain a positive attitude and negotiate with confidence.

When looking for industry, company, or salary data, the internet is your best source. It's comprehensive, quick, and free. In addition to company websites, check out professional organizations and the myriad of job search resources. You can even search newspapers from various cities for job ads as well as articles about organizations you are interviewing with. Be aware, however, that much web information is biased. For example, while company websites give you much valuable information - the annual report, who the key people are, what public image they're trying to present - they'll only tell you what they want you to know. Always confirm any information you find on the internet.

There are many tools available in your public or college library to help you with industry and company research. The librarians in the business division and the job information center of your public library can help you locate this information. The time you spend in research may be the extra push you need to get to the top of the candidate pool.

Prepare a Career Commercial

The career commercial is your answer to the most common interview question: "So, tell me about yourself." Keep the answer short. Take only one minute to summarize your major career accomplishments. At the same time, you want to peak the interviewer's interest, set the tone, and direct the rest of the conversation.

Prepare your commercial by writing and revising until you get what you want, then memorize it. The repetitive speech patterns common to many spectrumites will work well for you in this exercise. Practice in front of a mirror, checking your facial expression, gestures, and

tone of voice. Of course, you'll have to adapt it to different situations. Tweak it for various interviews, and use a more informal version at professional conferences, business meetings, and networking events.

Prepare Stories

In addition to the commercial, have on hand several short stories that illustrate your major achievements and showcase important skills. For example, many employers ask about how one would handle a difficult situation or a difficult customer. Prepare a story of how you handled such a situation. Use these stories to respond to the interviewer's questions. Begin with an overview of a situation, then explain what you did and how you achieved the goal. Like your commercial, these stories can be prepared in advance. They should be clear and concise - usually less than a minute. Write, revise, and rehearse.

Prepare Questions to Ask

You know that during the face to face meeting, you should actively listen, respond with interest, and ask questions. But, just what questions should you ask?

Open-ended questions are best; they elicit the information you are seeking, spur the discussion along, and put you in control.

Choose your questions to determine the responsibilities of the position and the needs of the company. Before the interview, learn as much as you can about the firm. If possible, determine the job titles of those who will be interviewing you, and think of questions to ask about what they do in relation to what you will be doing. For example, ask: "What do you consider to be the five most important day-to-day responsibilities of this job?" or, "What personality traits do you consider critical to success in this job?"

It's important to have specific questions for each member of the interview team. Each of these people has a unique perspective about the company and the position. Even asking similar questions of different people enables you to gauge consistency of opinions within the organization.

Ask what attracted them to your resume. If you know the answer early, you will be able to tell what they're looking for. Then, you can link your strengths to their priorities.

Ask, "Why is the position open?" This will clue you in on the fate of your predecessor. Did she retire? Was she promoted? In the case that the last person was terminated, you will need to ask additional questions to determine whether the company's expectations for the position are realistic. Try to determine where they went wrong and what you would do differently.

Find out whom you will be reporting to. This answer will help you discern the power structure of the company. You can also ask about the duties and responsibilities of the position. To get an idea of their priorities, ask how much time will be spent in each area of responsibility. I also like to learn about communication channels within the organization.

Another way to ascertain their priori-

ties is to find out what are the top three things they would like you to accomplish during the first quarter you are with them. In addition to telling you their expectations, this question can lead to an interesting discussion about various dimensions of the job.

After they ask you to share your strengths and weaknesses, turn the focus back on them by asking, "Please describe your management style." The answer will tell you how compatible you are with your supervisor-to-be. If the interviewer will be your boss, ask him to define the model working relationship between an employee and supervisor.

You can also ask about training and advancement opportunities. Where will the job take you in five years? What are the opportunities for advancement in this field? Does the company provide ongoing training?

To avoid misunderstanding, ask if there's anything that you could clarify before you leave.

Save salary and benefit questions until the end of the interview if you ask them at all. Asking these too early in the game gives the impression that your main interest is dollars, not the challenge or opportunity of serving the company.

At the end of the meeting ask, "How soon may I expect to hear from you?" This question makes your interest in the job evident, lets you know the time frame they are working with, and allows you to tailor your follow-up strategy.

Most candidates don't realize that they're judged not only by their answers, but also by their questions. Smart questions help you get a better feel for the job. They also show your enthusiasm to the employer.

Make the Interview into Show and Tell

A career portfolio can showcase your professional achievements. While a resume outlines your skills and abilities, a portfolio displays the results of your work, offering the prospective employer proof of what you can do. As a spectrum individual, this is even more important. You must compensate for impaired social ability by excelling in your field. The portfolio sells your work rather than your personality. It shifts the focus off you to your accomplishments.

For example, the education heading of your resume lists your degrees, certificates, and continuing education courses. Your portfolio expands this information by offering course descriptions and certificates, providing evidence for the items listed in your resume.

Artists and models have been using portfolios for a long time, but almost any profession can do the same. In my library portfolio, I included samples of library brochures, pathfinders, and subject guides that I designed, samples of Internet searches, newspaper clippings about the library, and fliers advertising library events. Secretaries can include samples of correspondence, spreadsheets, and other projects. Teachers can include lesson plans, sample tests and student evaluations. Programmers can make a demonstration disk. Blueprints and finished products, such as machine parts,

can also be included. Virtually anything you designed, developed or produced can be part of your portfolio. The possibilities are limitless. Be creative. The items you include should illustrate your unique style, ability, talents, and potential.

Career portfolios give you a competitive edge; this is particularly important for individuals on the autism spectrum. By showing off your work, you take the emphasis off your personality. Remember, the portfolio is a sales tool. Analyze the audience (the company you wish to work for). What do they want? How do your skills and supportive documentation meet the prospective employer's needs?

When applying for a job or a promotion, mention your portfolio in the cover letter. Once you have landed an interview, prepare. Look over your portfolio, and decide which items are most appropriate for the company and assignment you are interviewing for.

Bring your portfolio to the interview and have it ready. When the interviewer asks what you have accomplished, smile and say, "Let me show you." This is your cue to get out your portfolio. Use it to answer the interviewer's questions. If they ask about your career goals or future plans, take them to that section in your portfolio. If they want to know about your computer skills, show them computer-generated samples, demonstrating the skills they are seeking. Think of the interview as show and tell. Be selective. You don't need to show everything in your portfolio -- just the items most appropriate to the situation.

Brag about your accomplishments. Show them what you have done. Relate it to their needs and they will see how you can best serve their business.

Follow Up

Always end the interview by asking about the next steps. When you get home, write a follow up letter. Be meticulous about follow-up with phone calls.

In conclusion, be confident about your abilities and show enthusiasm for the job. Remember that interviewing is about selling yourself to the employer. You have to give them reasons to buy by explaining what you can do for them. Your job as a salesperson is to convince them that your product is better than the competition's.

Yvona Fast, MLS is the author of Employment for Individuals with Asperger Syndrome or Non-verbal Learning Disability: Stories and Strategies, (JKP, 2004) a career guide for individuals with Asperger Syndrome or Non-Verbal Learning disability. The Polish language edition of this book came out in March 2008. Her work in learning disabilities and neurological impairments is based on her experiences and on interviews with individuals who live with these disabilities. She has authored two more books: My Nine Lives (2011) is a memoir she co-authored with her mother and Garden Gourmet: Fresh & Fabulous Meals From Your Garden, CSA or Farmers' Market (2013) is a seasonal cookbook. For more information, please visit www.wordsaremyworld.com.

Teach from page 4

participants have worked the land, built friendships and developed a sense of community. James, an environmental science college student, loved his time on the farm, especially the camaraderie he felt working side by side with other volunteers and staff. According to James, "I developed a sense of responsibility to complete the assigned tasks and, as a result, I gained a greater sense of confidence." He added, "I really liked learning about healthy eating and I even introduced my family to new fruits and vegetables." Michael K., another Compass participant, enjoyed learning about farming, nutrition and the tasks necessary to keep a farm running. "I decided to start a small garden of my own at home. I like to see the plants grow." For three years, Michael F. has volunteered on the farm. His love and passion for working there and the friendships he formed gave him new skills and confidence. While he continues to volunteer there, he now has a paying job at ShopRite. According to Dan Holmes, "Beyond the work that they did, it is important for the Farm that everyone work together as a tight community, and they fit in very well with everyone. At the same time, I and the other workers were reminded that every one of us has different abilities and disabilities. It is a good lesson for all of us and helps us work better together."

JCCA job coaches assess every individual while providing each with pre-vocational support, services and coaching on site until the intern is able to work independently. JCCA staff works closely with employers to maintain an open line of communication to ensure a successful working relationship. "Compass coaches assess the skills and interests of all participants to give them a valuable internship experience tailored to their career goals. When our interns succeed, we succeed. It is an amazing feeling to see them growth in confidence and ability," emphasizes Compass Coach, Skyler Friedman Conway.

Trevor, 25, who has a developmental disability and other physical and medical issues, lives independently in White

**JCCA interns at the Food Bank for Westchester**

Plains. He wanted to work with mechanics and was placed at J and J Presto as a gas station attendant and mechanic's assistant in White Plains, NY. But his new boss, Jim, had no experience working with people with disabilities and wasn't sure if it would be a good fit for his business. Trevor explains, "This was the job I really wanted. I was so happy to be given the opportunity to 'live my dream.'" Compass coaches supported Trevor on- and off-site. Today Jim says, "Now that we have been working together for almost a year, I have come to know, value and understand Trevor. Now he is just 'one of the guys.'" Compass worked with Trevor, Jim and counselors to make the position paid and permanent. Since then, Trevor has had a raise, learned how to do oil changes and change tires. Overcoming multiple learning differences and some physical restrictions, Trevor continues, "I have gained a lot of confidence and learned how to be successful in the workplace." This is due in large part to his positive attitude and the support of an employer who has learned that hiring people with learning differences is not as challenging as he originally thought. A few weeks ago, Trevor came in to a weekly coaching session with a huge smile on his face and said, "I'm so proud. I now have a uniform!" Trevor's story is a testament to his own determination, the

support of his employer and the skill and dedication of the Compass staff.

Group Internships

Group internships help participants who need a greater level of support. They offer the opportunity to observe participants' work-readiness skills in a more supportive environment to help develop social and vocational skills.

The Food Bank for Westchester

The Food Bank for Westchester is the core of the county's emergency food distribution network. It solicits, acquires, warehouses and distributes food to more than 265 food pantries, soup kitchens and shelters as well as adult, childcare and treatment centers to some 200,000 Westchester children, seniors and their families who are hungry or at-risk of hunger.

"I am learning how to be organized and getting a lot of experience. It feels great that I am accomplishing so much and helping people in need," says Ben Norry, a JCCA intern.

"JCCA interns are vital to the Food Bank's ability to distribute more than seven million pounds of food to our member agencies. We are able to plan our week's deliveries knowing that the time they devote to volunteering each Wednesday will

produce hundreds of pounds of donated food items being sorted, evaluated and repacked. It's a situation in which everyone wins. Our communities are nourished and our hardworking, dedicated interns learn important vocational skills and help make our community healthier, stronger and kinder. I am proud of the work we do together. The relationship that we have developed over the years is one of great affection and respect," explains Nancy Lyons, Manager of Volunteer Services.

The Greenburgh Nature Center

The Greenburgh Nature Center is an educational leader in the region that advances environmental literacy and is a model of best sustainable practices. They provide a range of community activities engaging people with each other and the natural environment, instilling in future generations an appreciation for nature and a will to protect it.

"Our JCCA interns allow us to provide better husbandry and care to our collections, and better service and attention to our public visitors. It has only strengthened my willingness and desire to hire people with special needs, although my willingness was already high. This experience has brought more attention to all staff that we are a community destination and that it is beneficial to have more of our community represented," affirms Travis Brady, Director of Education.

And the interns are learning too. "I'm learning about teamwork, how to feel more comfortable around animals and how to be more comfortable in a job setting. My internship has really taught me that you can handle any kind of job if you can handle something like this. I am thinking about a career with animals. I want to have good jobs on my résumé so I can build a career," says Brandon Barenfeld, JCCA intern at Greenburgh Nature Center.

Elise Hahn Felix, LCSW, is Director of Transition Services, Shari Abel Saunders is Job Development Coordinator, and Valerie Rosen is Compass Coordinator at Jewish Child Care Association's Compass Project. For more information, please visit <http://jccany.org/compass>.

Win-Win from page 25

for as long as is needed is recommended.

Step 3 - Setting up the work environment for success. This requires a detailed study of the work environment by the job coach or employment specialist. What is the configuration of the work station, how is the work distributed, what are the specific tasks and instructions for getting the job done, and where does it go when completed? Visual supports, a daily work schedule, including reminders and a detailed task list are provided at the work station if needed.

Step 4 - Prior to starting work, the prospective employee is brought in for an orientation. At this time they meet their supervisors and co-workers, take a tour of the office, become familiar with the company's mission, and begin to learn the structure and routines of the company. We opted not to disclose their disability to the office staff, although over time people became aware of the "difference." Ultimately they were embraced and supported by their co-workers, and as Greg would point out, "We were all enriched by their presence."

Step 5 - Making sure the work works for the

person hired is determined through a one month probation period. During this time the employee meets with the job coach and supervisor daily to work out the glitches, communicate expectations, and if needed a skills development plan and supports are put in place to assure their success.

Full disclosure requires that I mention that out of four employees hired, one individual did not have the organizational and attentional skills needed to get the job done with accuracy and in an acceptable time frame. Three employees are still on the job a year later.

Clearly my personal relationship with

the employer helped to clinch the deal with Rowan Document Solutions and created an opportunity for the prospective employees to be hired. Not everyone has that advantage. Seek out supportive employers who are willing to hire, with an appreciation for unique talent and skills, and a willingness to learn what motivates people. The result will be a win-win for all, opening the doors to opportunity for many.

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Independence from page 10

in life is to be one of the best and well-known DJs in my area.

Customer Service/Retail

I recently started working part-time at a local independent movie theater that shows films such as documentaries and independent films. I have been working at this job for about two months now, and I am really enjoying it. My job duties consist of cashiering, ticket handling, and

working in the concession area popping popcorn, pouring drinks, and assisting customers' needs.

Aviation

I have a private pilot certificate and fly regularly in my spare time. I am currently studying in the aviation management program at Guilford Technical Community College in Greensboro, North Carolina. I have an internship at the local branch of Landmark Aviation, which is a nationwide aircraft charter company. Besides

helping out at Landmark, I also wash and wax aircraft at the local flight school to make their airplanes look spic-and-span for customers. With my internship at Landmark Aviation and work at the local flight school, I hope to build upon my experiences to gain more knowledge of the aviation industry. My goal is to own and manage my own airport.

I am now able to live without my parents or other assistance in various areas. I've improved greatly in a variety of ways: cooking, cleaning, social, and financial. CIP's services have helped me become

independent, live happily, and become the person who I am today.

This article has been reprinted with permission from the January/February 2014 issue of Autism Asperger's Digest, a bimonthly magazine on autism published by Future Horizons, Inc. www.autismdigest.com.

Jay Mikush has two siblings and a dog named Banjo. He loves skiing, riding roller coasters, flying airplanes, mobile DJing, biking, singing, karaoke, swimming, hanging out with friends, and listening to and writing music.

College from page 15

interview, job search, etc.) and a capacity to perform the job. Not all these jobs require a college degree but can provide a "good job" for someone with skills. I am not dismissing or minimizing the value of

a college education; I am stating that there are alternatives that can provide a student on the spectrum with opportunities that may have gone unnoticed.

This article was originally published in the spring 2014 issue of the Asperger

and High Functioning Autism Association's (AHA) print publication, On The Spectrum.

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itan Region. He is an adjunct at Dowling College since 1997 teaching Transition Services in Special Education at the graduate level. He has over 32 years of experience in employment services for students and adults with autism. For more information, please visit www.ceoincworks.com.

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Language from page 31

to directives, it is not that they are displaying insubordination. Instead, it should be realized that the employee with ASD is having a communication breakdown in processing the directive. They may have been focusing on the first step of the directive and may not have been attending to the subsequent steps. They may have short-term memory impairment that prevented them from storing the task requirements. Perhaps, the employee with ASD could not adequately process the directive and this impeded them from executing the commands. Challenges with semantics may have played a role. The employee with ASD may have a weak understanding of word meanings and this inhibited them from carrying out the directive.

Pragmatic impairment is a hallmark of ASD. Individuals with ASD present with nonverbal and verbal language challenges. These communication deficits vary from person to person and impact how employees with ASD function socially. Some nonverbal language challenges are inappropriate eye contact during conversations, inadequate interpretation of social cues, and poor adherence to the social rules of proximity. Establishing and maintaining eye contact can be challenging for individuals with ASD.

In the workplace, employees with ASD may not look at their conversational partner while speaking. It is important that employers and coworkers do not misinterpret limited eye contact as shyness, lack of interest, or untrustworthiness. Instead, they should understand that workers with ASD often find it uncomfortable to establish and maintain eye contact while conversing. Employees with ASD often lack the ability to interpret social cues because they often lack social problem solving and perspec-

tive taking skills. They do not adequately read nonverbal signals to gauge their listeners' interest in their conversation. Individuals with ASD often do not understand and respect personal boundaries. They are often observed to not adjust their proximity to their conversational partners. In the workplace, they may violate a person's personal space by standing too close when they speak.

Employees with ASD are often not flexible with routine changes. They function best with established routines. Examples include having a fixed shift, number of hours of work, break/lunch time, meeting time and location, procedures to complete task, work area, location of supplies, and location of supervisor. Having a set routine makes them better employees and reduces their anxiety. Individuals with ASD often use verbal language in atypical ways. They often have challenges in initiating, maintaining, and terminating a conversation. Some employees with ASD will not be the first to start a conversation or greet their managers and coworkers. Poor topic maintenance and limited social reciprocity make maintaining a conversation problematic. The conversations do not flow effectively. Workers with ASD may abruptly switch topics without signaling that the topic has changed, their utterances can be tangential and irrelevant to the topic, and they may not carry out adequate listener-speaker roles (i.e. talk while someone else is talking). Their responses to "WH" questions (who, what where, etc.) can be non-contingent to the question. An employee with ASD may engage in a conversation and then suddenly and inappropriately terminate the conversation.

During the work day, individuals with ASD may discuss topics that are not appropriate for the workplace, and can be

blunt and too honest during a conversation. Their challenge lies in inflexible social adjustment. They demonstrate difficulty with adjusting their conversation to match the conversational partner and the context. Perseveration and echolalia are apparent in some employees with ASD. They are often observed to perseverate on topics they are passionate about. They may talk continuously about trains, baseball, dinosaurs, say hello numerous times a day, and repeatedly ask the same questions. This can be disruptive in the workplace. Employers, coworkers and customers may not be interested in the topic or may have heard the same information several times before, and may also find it bothersome to repeatedly give the same answer to the same question. It is important for employers and coworkers to know that workers with ASD perseverate on topics because doing so reduces anxiety and it is their method of being social; it is their way of contributing to a conversation.

Another verbal repetitive behavior is echolalia. This is when individuals with ASD continuously repeat song lyrics, lines from a movie, or phrases that they heard recently or some time ago. This is also an anxiety reducing method and a social contribution. Individuals with ASD often do not understand humor and respond to figurative language in literal ways. If someone tells a joke, the employee with ASD may not see the humor, nor have an appreciation for the humor. They often cannot interpret humor and figurative language because some of them are concrete thinkers and have literal interpretations for abstract language.

Employees with ASD are valuable additions to the workforce. As an increasing number of them are being hired, it is imperative that employers provide accommodations for workers with ASD and continuous staff development on

ASD. Some strategies and accommodations that can reduce communication barriers and support employees with ASD include:

- Use simple spoken and written language to facilitate word meaning deficits.
- Repeat directions (gives ample chances to store, process, and interpret information).
- Reduce directives into smaller steps.
- Provide increased response time to facilitate word finding challenges and to process spoken and written language.
- Use visual and auditory prompts to indicate routine changes.
- Give several advance notices about schedule and routine changes
- Hold frequent staff trainings about ASD and how to tailor the work day to meet the needs of employees with ASD.
- Implement ASL training.
- Hire/consult with a Speech-Language Pathologist to treat workplace communication barriers.

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Insecurities from page 19

from this survey, UJA-Federation enlisted the help of appropriate collaborators from across this network — including Jewish community centers, human service agencies, camps, hospitals, and others — asking them to create a vision of new infrastructures and holistic programming that would increase the independence and community inclusion of young adults with ASD in both the Jewish and larger community.

With big and bold dreams, five agencies, the Edith and Carl Marks Jewish Community House of Bensonhurst, Mid-Island Y Jewish Community Center, Sid Jacobson Jewish Community Center, The Jewish Community Center in Manhattan, and Westchester Jewish Community Services were given small grants to plan intensively how to develop their vision into actual programming for individuals with ASD. Six months later, all of the agency plans were funded by UJA-Federation for implementation. Though each model is slightly different and designed to address specific local needs, all of the programs are based on the premise that individuals on the spectrum can be successful in their workplace and can sustain those jobs when:

- *Strong and lasting relationships are*

built with local employers. Asset-focused and support-based outreach and education help to build a cadre of businesses that are willing to advocate on behalf of individuals with ASD. When employers can talk to other employers about hiring this cohort, they can communicate that individuals on the spectrum hold unique talents and strengths that make them specifically qualified for certain job responsibilities. This is not an act of charity; it's good business. Beyond employers, other employees must also be educated on understanding and being sensitive to diversity, including individuals on the spectrum. Educational workshops and peer mentor programs among colleagues help ensure social integration for the individual with ASD in the workplace.

- *Vocational preparation includes workplace social skills training.* The most significant barrier to individuals with ASD getting and keeping a job does not revolve around an inability to do the job, but rather, an inability to socialize appropriately on the job. One such challenge is that social skills taught in school to individuals with ASD, such as interacting with peers

and speaking one's mind, did not translate to a work environment where one has to interact with supervisors and colleagues, and operate in client situations and meetings. Therefore, it is essential that training for individuals with ASD moves beyond concrete tasks and hard job skills. This means that social skills curricula for navigating the workplace must be created and used in conjunction with traditional methods of vocational training.

- *Individuals with ASD are matched with suitable jobs and workplace environments.* Individuals with ASD should not be placed in a job just because it happens to be open. A comprehensive vocational assessment is one step in the long process of getting to know an individual's interests, goals, and vision in pursuit of a fulfilling workplace match. Most individuals with ASD were dissatisfied with their employment because it didn't match their skills or interests.
- *Ongoing job support is provided.* Matching an individual to a job is not the end of the process, but the beginning. Obtaining a job does not equate with maintaining a job and, in fact,

they require different skills. After a service provider offers help in building skills, strengthening emotional intelligence and brokering relationships with employers, they must then work with individuals and employers to maintain learned skills, support and restore emotional resiliency, and mediate unexpected conflicts that arise in the workplace.

Work is a rewarding experience and a pathway to feeling productive, contributing to the world and finding a purpose in everyday life. Individuals with ASD have the potential to be excellent employees, appreciated by staff and management alike. These individuals are also equally deserving of the opportunity to find their own passion and purpose through work. Through employer education, specific social skills training, individualized job matching processes, and ongoing support, adults with ASD can live the independent life they want in a community that is inclusive and appreciative of their strengths.

Melanie Goldberg, LMSW, is Planning Associate of the Caring Commission at the UJA-Federation of New York. For more information, please visit www.ujafedny.org/support-for-family-caregivers.

Insurance from page 13

3-tiered delivery system described by the Behavior Analysis Certification Board's (BACB) publication titled *Guidelines: Health Plan Coverage of Applied Behavior Analysis Treatment for Autism Spectrum Disorder* (www.bacb.com/Downloadfiles/ABA_Guidelines_for_ASD.pdf) and reimburse for all 3 levels, or is an alternative adopted? One pitfall companies have experienced is requiring that all services, including direct one-to-one services historically completed by a Behavior Technician, be conducted solely by a Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA). This type of plan design greatly diminishes access. That is, in most cases BCBA's are not available to provide a client with 10-40 hours per week of direct service, and as such, families and carriers will be hard pressed to find BCBA's to fulfill these authorizations.

Overall, insurance reform across the United States is increasing access to evidence-based treatments provided by Be-

havior Analysis for those affected by an ASD. While challenges exist in implementation and recruiting self-insured companies, the trend is encouraging.

Highland Behavioral focuses on Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA), Autism, and practice management. Highland Behavioral provides specialized benefits insight, organization and management services. Our clients include behavior analytic companies, state agencies, employers and MCOs.

Ensure Billing's (EBI) practice management platform provides an efficient, robust yet intuitive system for behavioral health practices. EBI offers a platform that easily files insurance claims, as well as manages business activities, such as scheduling, payroll, electronic files, client management, and employee management.

For more information, please contact Bryan at bryan@highlandbehavioral.com or visit <http://highlandbehavioral.com> or <http://ensurebilling.com>.

List of States with Autism Insurance Reform

Indiana	2001	Iowa	2010
South Carolina	2007	Vermont	2010
Texas	2007	Missouri	2010
Arizona	2008	New Hampshire	2010
Louisiana	2008	Massachusetts	2010
Florida	2008	Arkansas	2011
Pennsylvania	2008	West Virginia	2011
Illinois	2008	Virginia	2011
New Mexico	2009	Rhode Island	2011
Montana	2009	New York	2011
Nevada	2009	California	2011
Colorado	2009	Michigan	2012
Connecticut	2009	Alaska	2012
Wisconsin	2009	Delaware	2012
New Jersey	2009	Minnesota	2013
Maine	2010	Oregon	2013
Kentucky	2010	D.C.	2013
Kansas	2010		

NYC Overload from page 5

“New York City Overload”

*Written and performed by the
Miracle Project NYC*

*New York City overload
New York City overload
New York City overload
New York City*

*It's stupid loud in New York
There's such a crowd in New York
There's so much noise and honest oys (OY!)
You can't keep your poise*

*Too many rats in New York
And Fat Cats in New York
Crammed into this stinky train*

It's too much for my brain

*There's a premium on space so
pigeon get outta my face
You gotta find your place in New York*

*New York City overload
New York City*

*Life is rough in New York
Folks are tough in New York
So hey, we got some attitude- it's honest,
it ain't rude*

*I'm always broke in New York-
(but not really)
And school's a joke in New York
(but that depends)
You gotta do what you gotta do
AND WATCH OUT FOR THAT POO!*

*In this town you can get around
If you're a freak a geek or a dork
You gotta find your place
in New York*

*New York City overload
New York City overload
New York City overload
I THINK I'M GONNA EXPLODE!*

*I'll be a star in New York
Don't need a car in New York
The food is great, it's the empire state
andw the people are first rate!*

*So you can have your cheesecake
and eat it too
With a plastic deli spork
You got to find your place
In New York!*

*New York City overload
New York City overload
New York City overload
I THINK I'M GONNA EXPLODE!*

*So plug your ears and close your eyes,
Too much external stimuli
The sights, the sounds, the smells, the
PIES...*

*You gotta find your place in New Yooork.
(TAXI..!!)*

*The Daniel Jordan Fiddle Foundation
(www.djfiddlefoundation.org) develops,
advocates for and funds programs, re-
sources and public policy that benefit the
diverse population of adults living with
Autism. Visit our website to contact us and
learn more about our national initiatives.*

Providing from page 20

makers in discussions about employment, WI-BPDD's project is identifying opportunities for employment. Each school site hosts community conversations that bring together students, employers, family members, community leaders, and school personnel to discuss opportunities for employment. Through collaboration and networking with employers, the schools identify job internship and paid work opportunities. Some schools have created school-based businesses. One school partners with a business that sells student's art work, while another school gives back to the community through a [bicycle recycle program](#). Several schools have produced [public service announcements](#). As a result of the WI-BPDD project, many more youth are reporting a desire to go to work and more families are educated about integrated employment and the transition process.

Minnesota Life College

Minnesota Life College (MLC) supports young adults after they transition out of high school. MLC believes that work is an essential part of individuals becoming thriving and integrated members of society. According to Executive Director Amy Gudmestad, MLC uses a holistic approach and teaches independent living and work readiness skills, while working to identify each individual's career interests, strengths, and support needs. MLC identifies these factors through vocational assessment and exploration activities. During a training internship program, participants receive on-going instruction and support for addressing and overcoming a range of workplace related obstacles (e.g., navigating social situations, stress/anxiety management). Participants gain the skills necessary to function within work setting to obtain sustainable employment.

Marissa, a student at MLC, had an extensive work history, but had never found the *right* job. She and the vocational staff noted that she enjoyed people and had excellent customer service skills. As a result, Marissa obtained a sales associate position and has been employed for two years. At one point, Marissa was told that she would lose her job. With MLC support, Marissa practiced her responses in difficult situations and learned appropriate behaviors during role-play sessions. She worked with staff to write scripts and practice. Initially when Marissa was hired, she did not disclose her diagnosis. Later, with the support of MLC staff, she disclosed her disability and set up accommodations. Today, Marissa works in the busiest department of the store and with accommodations can move to a quieter department when overwhelmed.

Autism Society of Minnesota

Coming from a different angle than those organizations already described, the Autism Society of Minnesota (AuSM) seeks to ensure that attention and community resources are given to employment initiatives for people with autism. Executive Director Jonah Weinberg reports that AuSM is focused on the limited knowledge employers have about autism, and is working to get and keep employers engaged in the potential that the adult autism community can bring to the workforce. At the state level, AuSM has launched partnerships with key government agencies and private businesses with the goal to expand employment opportunities for individuals with ASD.

AuSM is exploring ways to set a standard and a template that companies can follow, in an effort to create inclusive workplaces. AuSM provides opportunities for employers, human resource recruiters and hiring managers to learn about autism through workshops, customized consultation, and an informational booklet (*Overlooked Talent: Investing in Employees with Autism*). Additionally, AuSM facilitates roundtable discussions and an annual *Autism and Employment* forum to develop solutions and strategies that can break down barriers to jobs. These forums provide a highly visible platform to highlight and celebrate corporations (3M, Best Buy, Cargill, Target and Walgreens) that are finding ways to proactively incorporate individuals with ASD into their workforce. The Minnesota Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities website hosts "Meet the Future Face of Employment: Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder in Technology Fields" (www.mnddc.org/asd-employment). The website lists specific actions that individuals can take to facilitate the education, training, and employment processes that result in tech careers for individuals with ASD.

Specialisterne Midwest

While organizations like WI-BPDD and MLC are preparing individuals for employment and AuSM is working with employers to open doors to opportunities, Specialisterne is supporting individuals on the job through a consultant model. Many individuals with autism have a special aptitude for STEM careers (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math). Utilizing individuals with ASD in the technology industry has been successful in Denmark where entrepreneur Thorkil Sonne founded Specialisterne (<http://specialisterne.com/>). In this model, individuals with ASD are employees of Specialisterne and consultants in the companies in which they are placed to work. Some companies do not feel equipped or understand how to meet

the needs of individuals with special needs. These companies can contract with Specialisterne to fill job positions. Specialisterne matches the unique skill sets of individuals with ASD with businesses who are in need of employees with those skills. This model allows companies to diversify the workforce and get a valuable worker while minimizing their anxiety about supports. Specialisterne makes it possible for individuals with ASD to excel in the workplace.

Specialisterne USA is driving the nationwide expansion of the proven international job creation and employment concept. Sonne, a father of a son with ASD, is partnering with a team in the Midwest. Specialisterne Midwest is headquartered in the Twin Cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul, and is comprised of Iowa, Minnesota, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wisconsin. Sonne, President of Specialisterne USA, believes there is much opportunity in the US to create meaningful and productive jobs for the growing number of people diagnosed with ASD. Specialisterne Midwest branch plans to assess and train people with autism, and then employ them as consultants providing valuable services to corporate clients in sectors including IT, telecommunications, software and science/engineering. Executive director Tony Thomann is moving forward with the first cohort in Fargo North Dakota where consultants will be placed in positions of software testing and quality assurance. This organization has a goal to enable one million jobs globally, and 100,000 jobs in the US, for people with autism.

In conclusion, there are numerous barriers to employment for individuals with ASD. It takes many organizations getting involved and multiple strategies to improve opportunities for employment. The programs highlighted in this article, demonstrate the types of preparation and on-going supports being utilized to enhance employment outcomes for people with autism. Through programs such as the ones described in this article, individuals with autism are being empowered to use their talents and interests to attain and sustain employment.

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For more information on Autism Society of Minnesota (AuSM), contact Jonah Weinberg, Executive Director at (651) 647-1083, email jweinberg@ausm.org or visit www.ausm.org.

For more information on Minnesota Life College (MLC), contact Amy Gudmestad, Executive Director at (612) 869-4008, email agudmestad@mnlifecollege.org or

visit www.minnesotalifecollege.org.

For more information on Specialisterne Midwest, contact Executive Director Tony Thomann at tony.thomann@specialisterne.com or visit <http://usa.specialisterne.com>.

For more information on Wisconsin Board for People with Developmental Disabilities (WI-BPDD), contact Beth Swedeen, Executive Director at (608) 266-1166, email beth.swedeen@wisconsin.gov or visit www.letsgettoworkwi.org or www.wi-bpdd.org.

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Outcomes from page 23

- Brand recognition: Who is the company's customer base? Does the workforce reflect the characteristics of the company's customer base, enhancing the company's reputation in their markets and creating brand loyalty?
- Fulfillment of social mission: What are the social responsibility goals of the employer? Does hiring a particular individual advance the social responsibility goals of the company?

In the private sector these are questions professionals who work in the recruiting field consider when evaluating a job candidate. When the candidate is presented to the hiring manager, the recruiter can speak not only to their technical skills, but also to the intangible benefits that the candidate will offer the company. For vocational rehabilitation to improve its placement rates, this private sector focus on the intangible benefits a candidate brings to the company needs to be considered. But that is not enough.

The challenge of the vocational rehabilitation world includes an element that most private sector recruiters do not encounter – how does one present the benefits and challenges of a potential employee's disability in a way that the employer can understand and feel confident about being able to accommodate? For individuals on the autism spectrum, the challenges themselves can be very different for each person, both in their nature and severity. In order to engage employers in hiring individuals with an ASD, the vocational rehabilitation system needs to become a partner with the business world, providing a full service solution to including people with autism in their organizations.

At ASTEP, our mission is to increase the quality of life for individuals with Asperger Syndrome (AS) and high functioning autism (HFA) through suitable and

sustainable employment. Our goal is to be the bridge between individuals with AS/HFA, the professionals and organizations that support them and employers. ASTEP strives to open up a highly skilled and loyal, yet untapped, talent pool for employers, resulting in increased employment of individuals with AS/HFA. In working with employers, we see a growing interest in hiring people on the spectrum, a continuing skepticism about their capability to do so successfully, and a desire to work with a partner who supports them through the entire process. With this understanding, ASTEP has created a program to improve the employment opportunities and outcomes for individuals with autism. ASTEP's end-to-end solution provides an employer with assessment services, education and training tools, recruiting services and ongoing support for employees and managers. This full service model, driven by employers' hiring needs, should lead to an increase in the placement of people with autism into suitable and sustainable employment.

Each component of this model is equally important in ensuring success for the employee on the spectrum.

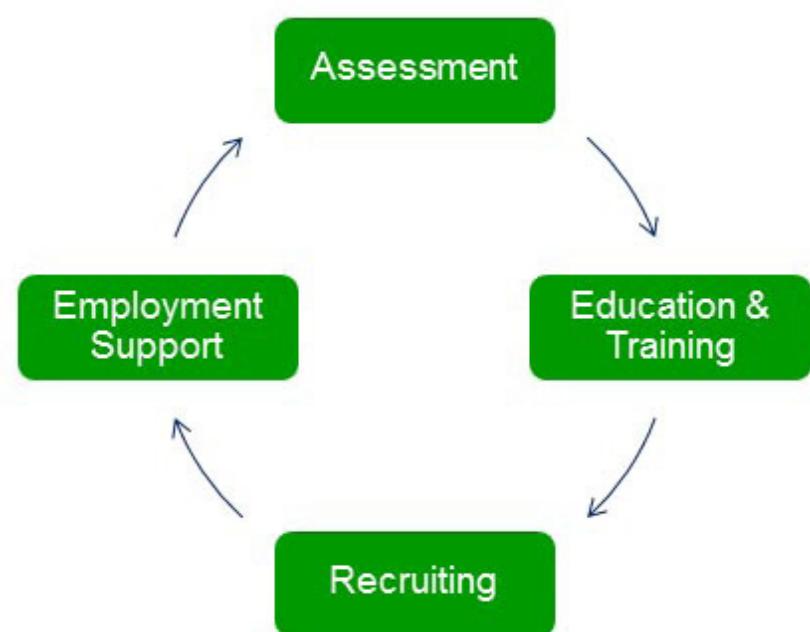
- Assessment includes working with employers to examine and develop appropriate job descriptions, evaluating the employer's hiring needs against each potential candidate's skills, addressing the non-technical considerations an employer has when hiring, conducting first level screening interviews of candidates, and providing interviewing and onboarding accommodation recommendations.
- Education and training include offering products and services that teach the employer how to recruit, interview, onboard, deliver performance management reviews, address legal and regulatory compliance issues, mitigate hiring risks, and troubleshoot employee relations problems with

their employees on the spectrum. It also includes interviewing and social skills training for employees with an ASD, to help individuals function better in the workplace.

- Recruiting is focused on presenting highly qualified candidates for each position the employer needs filled. ASTEP serves as the bridge between the professionals and organizations supporting individuals on the spectrum and the employers, to source qualified candidates.
- Ongoing employment support, for both the employee on the spectrum and their employer, is the glue that makes this model strong. The length of support needed will be different for each placement, but everyone involved in that placement needs to be willing to make sure the employee receives the coaching and mentoring they need, and that the employer has a "go to" person who can answer their questions about the employee and how to manage them successfully.

Many vocational rehabilitation organizations have built a robust process around a person-focused evaluation and placement model. This is critically important in making sure the individual is placed in a job that is appropriate for their skill sets and interests. It is equally important, however, to build an employer-focused placement model, which is integrated with the person-focused model, in order to improve the placement rates for individuals with autism.

The Asperger Syndrome Training and Employment Partnership (ASTEP) is a non-profit organization whose mission is to improve the quality of life for individuals with Asperger Syndrome (AS) and high functioning autism (HFA) through suitable and sustainable employment. ASTEP acts as the bridge between individuals with AS/HFA, the professionals and organizations that support them and employers. ASTEP strives to open up a highly skilled and loyal, yet untapped, talent pool for employers, resulting in increased employment of individuals with AS/HFA. For more information on ASTEP please visit our website at www.asperger-employment.org.



Employees from page 30

"Aspie" can be very good at attention to details, but other things – especially pertaining to unwritten or unspoken expectations – may get filtered out. Likewise, for the Aspie who thrives on a more relaxed pace, the demand for faster output can cause stress and, potentially, burn-out.

All things considered, the person with an ASD is more likely than most to face workplace pressure and a lower sense of self-worth, working hard and doing his or her best while coming to feel as though s/he is doing little or nothing right.

Having said all this, I'd like to offer a few suggestions to employers who currently, or may in the future, work with ASD employees:

1. Be open to unlooked-for niches. People with ASDs are very capable and valuable employees (many famously intelligent and successful people were said to have been on the spectrum). But they may require some flexibility – the kind that allows their employers to say, for example: "Herb has a hard time with X, but he does very well with Y. Perhaps he should be given responsibilities more consistent with Y." With ASD diagnoses on the rise, there are more of these people coming into the workforce. And that little extra patience and investment on your part will not only enable such people to be successful (it has proven invaluable to me in my own professional experience), but may in the long run produce remarkable returns you never expected.
2. Try to be as specific as possible with assignment expectations, deadlines, and what you and the organization need from your ASD employees. Don't just assume that they will intuit these things from the way your particular workplace...well, works, because that might not come as naturally to them.
3. Remember that you are working with people, not machines. People are diverse, not uniform; they cannot all fit into a planned "scheme" of operation.

For employers and for job-seekers on the spectrum, I would also recommend getting a hold of Stephen Shore's book "Beyond the Wall: Personal Experiences with Autism and Asperger Syndrome." In chapter 12, Shore includes a sample letter

identifying certain supports that can help facilitate a productive professional relationship between an employer and his/her ASD employee.

Not every person with an ASD is the same, and different people will both face and present different challenges. But these are some general guidelines that I hope will be useful, even if only to kick-start a much needed discussion.

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Opportunities from page 16

Again, clear communication plays pivotal importance in outlining a positive and successful work experience for an individual with ASD. Habituation for these individuals can require extended time periods for adapting to new routines and experiences. Allowing ample time to become accustomed to work life, to prioritizing new work tasks, commutes, goals, and schedules require open understanding between both employer and employee. While many times these conversations are newly traversed territories for both parties, it is through sustained compassion, patience, and clearly relayed information that misunderstandings may be avoided, and new career achievements attained.

After acquiring any new position, the difference between the career success or chronic unemployment of an individual with ASD often comes down to continued attention to the social, cultural, and behavioral supports put in place for continued value in the workplace. For many individuals with ASD active in the job market, negotiating difficult social interactions remains a large struggle in maintaining employment. In cases like these, a job coach

can make all the difference in translating experiences, helping employees with ASD “understand how supervisors and co-workers think and communicate on one hand, and help employers and co-workers understand how an individual with ASD thinks and communicates on the other” (Muller, Schuler, Burton, & Yates, n.d.).

Reviewing a workplace’s daily expectations, scheduled meetings, dress code, deadlines, and appointments can do so much to elucidate what often can appear to be a “grey area” for employees with ASD. This can provide unbounded relief in the journey toward individual self-determination and self-advocacy. With such communication tools in hand, an employee can grow familiar within work environments for indefinite amounts of time, mitigating the looming misunderstandings and miscommunications that so often result in a negative work experience. Indeed, mentorships and other such relationships can do much to align individuals on the spectrum with the career trajectories and framework they seek to thrive in (Muller, Schuler, Burton, & Yates, n.d.).

While negotiating autism in the workplace has in the past proved a daunting affair, new educational materials, infor-

mation and supports are being created all the time. There are a variety of means to enhance the job life of an individual with ASD, all of which serve to foster a communicative, tolerant, and profitable work environment. As is the case with all of us, what is of most importance in addressing autism in the workplace is to attend to what we all aim to cultivate: a clear and practiced awareness of the self that can transcend any work or business obstacle that lies ahead. In the clear considering and communicating of where an individual with ASD can excel in the workforce, how they do so and in what timeframe, provides that individual with indelible building blocks for constructing a life that satisfactorily and consistently meets the needs of themselves and the co-workers around them.

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Entrepreneur from page 22

as a non-profit corporation in New York State with the mission to develop job skills and employment opportunities for young women with autism. Our first venture is Girl AGain, which opened on February 8, 2014 in Hartsdale, NY.

Teaching to Work

I want to use Girl AGain as a realistic environment to teach people how to work in a business. This would then prepare them for employment in a business. High schools now are incorporating internships as part of their transition programming but I had concerns about what high school teachers actually knew about what was needed in business. (It’s no longer part of public education to have a vocational program).

My daughter’s transition program includes internships. I suggested that her teacher make a list of the skills she needed to learn for the workplace and begin teaching and incorporating those skills as part of her academic experience. For example in the work world, most jobs require collaboration with colleagues, yet in my daughter’s academic program she hardly had any group assignments – never a project that she had to do at home over a weekend with 3 other students. Shouldn’t she be under-

taking collaborative work in school to prepare her for the work place?

Since high school internships are typically the student’s first exposure to work, they tend to focus on the task that needs to be done, not on the business. A lot of the focus is on appropriate social behavior in the workplace – which is needed.

In a sample size of one, this was “validated” when I observed my daughter in her internships this fall. I had asked her if she knew why she was putting labels on shopping bags for a store she went to weekly from school with a job coach. She did not know why. It was just a task. But she liked being in the store because it was a small woman’s boutique with lots of fashion accessories, and lots of pink.

We take it for granted that we know that a shopping bag is an advertising device and that advertising helps bring more customers to the store which leads to sales and profits, which is what keeps the store in business. We take it for granted that if a person who made a purchase is carrying a shopping bag with a brand name they are implicitly making an endorsement, which is a good thing. Since this is not concrete some people need to be taught explicitly. I asked if she knew why the bags needed labels anyhow – why weren’t the bags printed with the store logo? Did she understand it was a business decision that probably was driven by

cost? (This would make a good math class problem to figure out the cost difference between preprinted bags and hand labeling plain bags with free labor.)

I have noticed that for people with ASD the question “why” does not come up too often. They don’t ask it and have a hard time answering it. “Why” is the key to generalization. “Why” helps put context around something that might seem isolated. “Why” helps people understand and to even think of alternatives, possibilities, options. This is how we can take a seemingly insignificant task like putting labels on bags and making it significant for helping a business achieve its goals, which is the function of work.

Why at Girl AGain

In the Girl AGain boutique, I had two workers take photos of each outfit. One of the workers did not want to remove the plastic bags – yes it was extra work – so I had to explain why: we get a better detailed photo that would not only be a document for us but it would be a promotion tool – we would put these photos on Pinterest so that people who can’t come to the store might be so enticed by the beautiful outfit that they would want to purchase online. We will now have a new rule in our process: take a photo of an outfit before put-

ting the plastic bag over the hanger. Why? for better quality photo for advertising.

Putting hang tags on the clothes – I had to explain that you put the tag hanging on the back of the outfit so that people first see the item, decide they like it and then look at the price – this is a better sales strategy. I can establish the rule: hang tags go to the back. But understanding why will help them to transfer this to other situations.

One worker, who is a friend of my daughter’s did not think of me as the manager. I asked her to do something and she said no. I asked her again and she refused again. She thought it was funny. I explained that we are not here to joke and her response was “I want to have fun when I work.” Now I realize I need to teach that the purpose of work is to accomplish a business objective not a personal objective. At work the individual is no longer the focus.

This venture is not just the employees with autism learning to work; I have a lot to learn about being an autism employment entrepreneur.

Girl Again is a resale boutique for American Girl dolls and is located at 157 South Central Avenue in Hartsdale, NY. 10530

Please like us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/GirlAgainBoutique. For more information, please contact Marjorie at (914) 428-1258 or mjmadfis@gmail.com.

Training from page 8

Through this program it has been clear that given the proper support, individuals

with autism can succeed and become valued employees. According to one manager, “Once we fully understand the capabilities and unique needs of individuals with ASD,

their passion, motivation and ability to work can truly blossom.”

“NewYork-Presbyterian Hospital/Westchester provides inpatient and outpatient

psychiatric services for children, adolescents, adults and the elderly. For more information, call 1-888-694-5700 or visit us at www.nyp.org/psychiatry.”

College from page 15

interview, job search, etc.) and a capacity to perform the job. Not all these jobs require a college degree but can provide a “good job” for someone with skills. I am not dismissing or minimizing the value of

a college education; I am stating that there are alternatives that can provide a student on the spectrum with opportunities that may have gone unnoticed.

This article was originally published in the spring 2014 issue of the Asperger

and High Functioning Autism Association’s (AHA) print publication, On The Spectrum.

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Expectations from page 28

work on a team, make decisions, strategic executive functioning (planning, prioritizing, and organizing tasks), solve problems, and communicate verbally. These are skills, according to employers, that new college graduates most need to demonstrate in order to achieve success in a wide array of career fields; these are the skills, according to employers, that, when clearly demonstrated on cover letters and resumes, will secure interviews for applicants time after time. To repeat, of the top ten skills, the first seven and the last one are *not specific* to the job, but are “soft skills” and appropriate workplace behaviors.

The good news for recent grads is this: the top skills employers are seeking can be learned and practiced both inside and outside the classroom. Knowing how to plan and prioritize tasks, for instance, is not the domain of one particular major or another. The bad news is this: if one lacks these skills, he’s going to have a really hard time securing well-paid employment.

Adults With Autism Are Not So Different

Adults with autism, at the end of the day, want the same thing all adults want. Regardless of their disability, their impaired social interaction and communication skills, and their areas of perseveration, adults with autism want to live as independently as they can, make decisions for themselves, and contribute to their communities and their societies in a meaningful way. Adults with autism, while needing varying degrees of accommodation in order to achieve these goals, pursue these goals with tenacity.

I know of individuals with autism who have the skills to do many complicat-

ed things, such as navigating their own public bus routes from home to work independently; these individuals enjoy the amenities that come along with planning one’s own transportation, such as reading for pleasure, shopping, stopping for coffee, and banking while on their ways to work.

Of course, for every individual with those skills I have encountered, I also know of others whose potentially-aggressive behavior or instances of self-injury (SIB) mask their underlying abilities and make the public bus a dangerous mode of transportation, for themselves and for other riders. Although riding the public bus may be deemed a non-preferred method of transit for some individuals, this should not imply that individuals would not benefit from riding a city bus once in a while.

Give Them a Chance

I have found, after working closely with over 100 adults with autism, those whose work is community-based demonstrate both a more positive affect and fewer anti-social behaviors than their peers who spend their entire days in the training center where instruction is provided. I don’t have the raw numbers, but anecdotal experience tells me that being within and among the community provides therapeutic benefit; I have seen how juxtaposed behaviors are when individuals return from their community-based job versus when individuals have been in training classrooms all day long.

Of course, as a service provider it has become more and more difficult to secure community-based jobs for the individuals we support. Employers—due to the employment market skewed in their favors—often prefer to give their open positions to recent college graduates in lieu of employ-

ing an adult with autism who may be, in their opinions, less predictable, less stable, and less skilled. A few years ago, there was a notion that adults with disabilities could take on the jobs that typically-developing people don’t want to do. Those jobs have all but disappeared.

Within the developmental disabilities world, the “Four F’s” are well-known and often avoided. The adults with whom I work are capable of doing more than food service, filing, flowers, and factory work; if given the chance, their skills can amaze. The challenge, though, is getting these individuals a chance to demonstrate their skills. If employers rely solely on resumes and interviews as the means of assessing an applicant’s skills, most of the individuals I work with will be left out of the pool. While many adults with autism *are* able to prepare winning resumes and cover letters, and many can even ace an interview, the majority of the individuals with whom I work could not. Because of this, many individuals with autism cannot even get their feet in the door.

Expect the Best

What I have learned over my years as an educator is this: people will surprise you if given the opportunity. This axiom has proven true in the years I have spent supporting adults with autism. The individuals I work with never stop surprising me, but it is because I am open to them doing so. I create opportunities for these individuals to reveal their strengths, talents, and interests. I am open to being surprised. I am *expecting* to be surprised. And this is the best kind of self-fulfilling prophecy. When given an opportunity to show their skills on a job, most of the adults I have worked with

can rise to the challenge. They will often need support and accommodation, but they *can* rise to the challenge. Of course, they need to be let in the door.

And therein lies the “rub.” When given an opportunity to show their strengths and talents, adults with autism relish the opportunity and rise to the challenge. But—in today’s economy—if employers are only willing to take a chance on the top 5% of job applicants, people with disabilities will neither get the consideration nor the opportunities to reveal their skills. Just as, since the economic downturn, the employment paradigm has shifted from perceived feast to famine, so to must the paradigm shift from “only the best” to “equal opportunity.”

To achieve a truly inclusive society, all stakeholders must be committed to its achievement. And though employers may want only the brightly-polished gems, service providers need to continue pushing so that employers are willing to take diamonds in the rough as well. Adults with autism can be those “diamonds in the rough” and service providers can try to build this population’s technical skills, but employers need to be willing to go out on a limb as well. Meeting half way will be mutually rewarding.

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Integrating from page 29

“used to have a special thing for board books” wants to purchase and recommend children’s books.

Shay, a 22-year-old American, is devoted to plants and wants to be “creating or supporting something that others can enjoy.” Her ideal job involves “providing green spaces for people on and off the spectrum to enjoy.” She is currently considering careers in horticulture therapy and landscape architecture.

29-year-old David, also from the US, envisions combining his special interests - social justice, math, and education - to innovate resources, perhaps by “coming up with ways to streamline education further, like incorporating it into videogames” or “brainstorming with others on the creation of a new education curriculum.”

To best reach more adults in the autism community, organizations from *all* industries ought to reach out to and support employees with special interests that correspond to their lines of business.

Viewed as a Weaknesses

Unfortunately, not everybody sees our special interests as positive. “I am intensely interested in issues that concern individuals with autism spectrum diagnoses, particularly Asperger’s,” said Graham, a 29-year-old American who works as a therapist. “The problem with this, though, is that a lot of people see this as negative obsession. They say I’m a workaholic and that I need to have fun, and that I should broaden my horizons by learning about other disorders too.” He’s confused: “I enjoy what I learn about, so I don’t know why that’s such a big deal.”

It’s not that we lack the smarts or skills to work. But current office climates aren’t always friendly to our types of minds. In work cultures that value multitasking, our abilities to super-focus on topics of interest are viewed as a weakness. Personal and professional connections don’t always see our special interests as the strengths they are.

Future from page 26

- “Alex can be distracted from a task easily.”

He could probably scrape by for the next six decades on the compassion or pity of society. I do hope he someday has that spring in the step after a day of good work he enjoys. (Maybe calling up Elmo on an iPad?) Regarding my own outlook, I can’t figure out where work – let alone money – fits into Alex’s universe. Perhaps if we get him to hand enough bills over the counters of Michael’s for little plastic jungle animals, then he’ll understand that sometimes we all spend our days in less-than-perfect ways to earn money for what we want.

What will he be paid? President Obama’s recent hike of the minimum wage includes – after vocalizing by advocacy groups –

Expert Knowledge

Instead of seeing people with ASD as preoccupied and narrow-minded, look at us as experts. “I am very focused on something if I am interested in it - obsessed,” explained Mallory, a 30-year-old from the US. “I absorb as much as I can like a sponge and take in more in one sitting than most neurotypical people would ever consider. I notice and remember details that others do not.”

45-year-old Zachary from Canada agrees. He has “a very broad knowledge base with a quick recall of relevant material. I have a prodigious memory, well-honed” in his special interest areas.

“My interest saved the day when someone misidentified the subject of a painting,” said Katherine, a 46-year-old American whose work relates to her special interests of Medieval European history, art, and costumes. “The painting was of Oliver Cromwell, but the person in the show was talking about Thomas Cromwell, who lived nearly 100 years earlier.”

And Graham? His interest “has dovetailed nicely into the work I do now,” he explained. “My focus on Aspie-related issues allows me to be very well-versed in my professional roles where I am working with an Aspie. I feel that being an in-depth expert in a single topic, while perhaps limiting my ability to work with other populations, strengthens my ability to work with Aspies.”

Driven Focus

Job coaches discourage workers on the spectrum from making informal speeches about special interests, but some jobs demand it. Paired with her graphic design and swimming passions, Mallory’s penchant for information holds her in good stead. “I teach swimming lessons and it allows me to monologue,” she said. “I work at a screen-print shop and can rattle off a lot about how our ordering process works and the different types of information that I need to calculate a quote.” It’s rewarding to find jobs in which our hyper-focus is useful and valuable.

similarly raising wages (to \$10.10/hour) for disabled workers. I didn’t know people like Alex worked for less, but under a government program originated long before we entered World War II, employers could pay certain disabled workers sub-minimum wages. “The Fair Labor Standards Act provides for the employment of certain individuals at wage rates below the statutory minimum,” the statute read, “(including) individuals whose earning or productive capacities are impaired by a physical or mental disability ... for the work to be performed. Employment at less than the minimum wage is authorized to prevent curtailment of opportunities for employment” (www.dol.gov/whd/specialemloyment).

Most disabled workers who worked for sub-minimum wages under the provision were employed in “segregated, sheltered” workshops. Operators of such workshops

Intensity isn’t a detriment. During a crisis, I’d want a rescue worker like Matt around because he has his heart in the job. The 20-year-old Canadian counts “helping others” and emergency services among his special interests. “It is a great experience,” Matt said of his involvement in volunteer firefighting and the auxiliary police. “Along with helping others, you feel that you’re a part of something by being on scene.”

Easing Career Changes

Katherine used to love how her job fit into her special interests, “but after working at it for thirteen years, I’m over it.” Changes are tough for anyone, even without autism’s deep need for routine. Katherine is not having a crisis, however, about what to do next. She’s just turning to her *other* special interests: “I would like to be able to knit and make jewelry well enough to make a living doing only that.” Katherine used her special interests to her advantage to make a graceful transition between fields.

Currently a subject matter expert in First Nations treaty negotiations, Zachary also used this underplayed adaptive strategy. By working in the theater, the foreign service, and private practice for law and medicine, Zachary has explored law, medicine, politics, theater, and travel - all of his special interests.

Loving Our Life and Livelihood

Perhaps most importantly, an engaging career improves quality of life for adults on the autism spectrum. “I’d love to just raise ornamental and edible plants,” said Shay of career ideas beyond horticultural therapy and landscape architecture. “I think it would be dreamy to work at a botanical garden or in some sort of urban center.” Listen to the passion in her voice: her job would be “dreamy”; she’d “love” it.

24-year-old Niklaas, who hails from the Netherlands, likes his current work in bookkeeping and accounting. “My job has to do with numbers and with the economy, two things I am very interested in,” he said. “Because of this, my job keeps being interesting for me and enjoyable to do.”

claim that including these workers in the president’s wage hike will lead to many disabled people being pushed out of work.

Interesting, and frightful. What other employment-statute landmines wait for my son and people like him? Or will Alex be lucky enough to run into the growing number of employers who even forego interviews and instead give workers a one-week tryout, who sometimes use picture systems in the workplace and who display the patience to tap a mania for routine and superhuman powers of concentration?

Just look at the other night at bedtime when Alex lost that plastic chicken behind the mattress and refused to budge from his bedroom no matter how I insisted that I last saw the chicken out by the couch. “Rooster,” Alex kept saying. “Awww, roo-ster...” We found the chicken.

I’m not sure Alex will ever hold a job

Happily Ever After?

Julia’s special interests are human sciences and learning, so she was directing her passion toward finding work interpreting neuroimaging. Now, “I’ve realized that I have an interest in how people learn,” she told me. Julia shone at her volunteer job assisting individuals with mental illnesses and learning disabilities, and is currently exploring “whether I’d like to look at the neuropsychology side or do something more practical like teaching and creating learning materials.”

Like Julia, 58% of people I interviewed felt that their dream job related to their special interests. But why aren’t bookstores and libraries warring over who gets Emma for their children’s sections? Which botanical garden will support Shay with her social and sensory issues as she contributes vitally to the organization? Adults on the spectrum need programs supporting passion-based employment.

While it won’t revolutionize every worker’s experience, special interest integration can be the key to happy and successful employment for some people on the spectrum. Emma’s most positive work experiences came from “having others be accepting of my strengths and weaknesses and being able to do what I love.”

Our special interests come with positive qualities like intensity, motivation, and expert-level knowledge. Our energy and enthusiasm about them translates to job dedication. And as we bring value to the organizations for which we work, so too will we find happiness and fulfillment in our own lives.

Emily Brooks is a journalist on the autism spectrum. She advocates through her writing for broader acceptance of members of the disability, queer, and gender-nonconforming communities. Emily lives in Brooklyn, New York, where she works with children and teenagers with autism and other disabilities. For more information please visit www.emilybrooks.com or email emily@emilybrooks.com.

job (of course, I once doubted he’d ride a school bus, too). For him, I think, employment will replace school as a place to go every day, where if he doesn’t show up people will miss him. Will he get such a place? Students with autism receive a lot of support in school years, support that often slams into a mother of a curtailment when they graduate.

“Are you worried what’s going to happen to him when he’s 21?” a school official asked me once.

“No,” I replied, “I’m worried what’s going to happen to him when he’s 40.”

That worry has become a job in itself.

Jeff Stimpson has authored two books: “Alex the Boy: Episodes From a Family’s Life With Autism” and “Alex: The Fathering of a Preemie.” Visit his blog is at <http://jeffslife.tripod.com/alextheboy>.

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class projects, and discussion. Sometimes the material covered in class is not covered anywhere else (i.e., textbook, PowerPoint slides, handouts, etc.), requiring techniques to ensure all material is accessible by the student. Outside of the classroom, reading materials tend to also become more taxing, covering abstract topics that can be difficult to understand. As opposed to reading simply for content, there is an increased emphasis of being able to analyze readings. Further, while high school classes tend to provide guided questions to lead the student through the readings, college classes tend to rely on the student to identify key topics and themes.

The fundamental changes above can seem hard to manage; however, by establishing assistive technology supports while still in high school, such transitions can be managed in a much more efficient manner. Creating a course of action is important for students with ASD because environmental changes may lead to high levels of stress that can drastically affect a student's ability to participate and succeed in the learning environment.

Below are some examples of how technology can be used to support students with ASD in the learning environment with a focus specifically on supporting students at the high school and college levels.

Tablets and Computers

With the advancement of technology, hand held computers are becoming more common. The use of these hand-held devices is slowly permeating into the academic field, finding particular use for students with ASD. Independent developers can create applications to address specific needs, but the digital aspect of reading materials is one of the most important benefits of these new devices. These devices can address fundamental difficulties a student may face, such as fine motor difficulties affecting the abil-

ity to turn the pages of a book. By utilizing a tablet, the frustration that manifests from these complications can be avoided (Stachowiak, 2010). Further, digital copies of lecture materials allow students to manipulate these notes in ways that can be beneficial. This can include, but is not limited to: increasing text size, color coding, sharing of notes, or incorporating supplemental notes or comments (Stachowiak, 2010). Digital books allow for a seamless experience for reading, allowing students to have all of their books in one place, along with supportive resources such as a dictionary, thesaurus, and online search engines.

Smart Pen

Assistive technology is extremely important for students that struggle with content heavy courses. Many times, ineffective listening skills and poor note-taking skills are the primary obstacles preventing comprehension of class lectures (Boyle, 2010). Smart Pens can be utilized to alleviate such hurdles. A Smart Pen is "a pen that contains a recording device, which when used with its accompanying notebook, links written notes to what was recorded at the time the note was written" (Stachowiak, 2010, p.5). As students are taking notes, the pen matches up the location of the notes to the time of the lecture, allowing students to review the contents of the lecture in tandem with specific locations in their notes. This allows students to supplement their notes with portions of the lecture they may have missed or misunderstood. The audio files can be transferred to the computer in order to make a more seamless experience of reviewing notes. Further, research has demonstrated that classrooms who share Smart Pen audio files online tend to have lower numbers of accommodation requests for notes and note takers (Stachowiak, 2010).

Word Prediction

Word prediction technology is found as

a feature in many computer word processing programs today. These programs, such as Co:Writer, provide students with a list of up to thirty possible target words after typing the initial letters of the word they are attempting to express. This software assists individuals in the writing process by changing the concentration from the physical activity of typing to the mental activity of processing and planning which words to use to express thoughts. The use of word prediction has led to an increase in the fluency and quality of students' written work (Peterson-Karlan, 2011). Word prediction can support word retrieval issues, spelling difficulties, and writing breakdowns, and has been found to increase content legibility, spelling accuracy, and writing efficiency (Handley-More, Deitz, Billingsley, and Coggins, 2003; Evmenova, Graff, Jerome, & Behrmann, 2010). Additionally, the results of a study conducted by Mirenda and Turoldo (2006) found that students using word prediction software led to an increase in writing stamina and a decrease in writing frustration. By removing the distraction of spelling errors and the frustration of the mechanics of writing by hand, there is an increased emphasis on content, allowing students to maintain focus on the topic at hand.

Using assistive technology to support individuals with ASD helps to overcome the limitations that have made academic success elusive for students in the past. It is important to start using technology to support learning in college while students are still in high school, as the work is more manageable and allows time to master the technologies, leading to improved preparation for the higher demands of college level curriculum. Getting systems of assistive technology put in place as early as possible will allow for higher levels of academic independence as the road to college approaches.

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programs: (a) work experiences in employment settings that take into account participants' strengths as well as challenges, such as executive dysfunction, concrete thinking, rigidity, sensory issues, and social communication challenges; (b) self-determination competence through person-centered planning to identify work opportunities that take into account special talents and skills that may have been developed and honed to high levels through over-selective interests in specific topics (e.g., trains, cars, animals, theater, food, mathematics); (c) modeling and video presentations that take into account unique learning and behavior characteristics associated with autism (e.g., difficulty with abstract concepts, trouble with fast-paced speech, preference for well-organized visual presentation); (d) participation in individual work, cooperative tasks, and technology-driven activities that take into account learning and behavior needs (e.g., difficulty with generalization of learned information to new situations, desire to have friends but inability to take initiative or act reciprocally, difficulty understanding expectations in cooperative group situations); (e) role playing and drawing that take advantage of skills and strengths that can be used to demonstrate competence; and (f) reflection and evaluation of learned knowledge through self-assessment, involving the need to look objectively at the consequences of one's actions and considering the interpretation of, and response to one's acts by others.

The role of families in the employment process is essential to effective employment intervention. Adult service providers may substantially increase their effective-

ness by supporting and communicating with families to help them obtain needed services, navigate agencies' bureaucracies, and resolve problems and obstacles. In addition, support of worksite supervisors to help them deal with learning and behavior differences of employees with autism is critical to employment success of individuals with ASD. As supervision responsibility is transferred from job coaches to jobsite personnel, communication channels should remain open in order to handle difficult situations promptly and to maintain a steady pace of on-the-job learning. In this way, as job tasks and requirements continue to develop and change over time, the employee with autism may be accommodated.

In conclusion, with UDT, as the base for employment intervention, programs can offer a range of possible supports, services, and training to help prepare adults with autism for employment. The Universal Design feature of UDT eliminates the need to "retro-fit" services, which can delay employment outcomes and extend the length of needed to receive services. In addition, use of person-centered planning can assure that the focus of employment goals, supports, and services are based on the preferences of the individual, which increases the likelihood that goals will be met. Finally, ongoing open communication with families and employers are essential to effective employment intervention for persons on the spectrum.

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Meyer's *Asperger Syndrome Employment Workbook*, Valerie Paradiz's *The Integrated Self-Advocacy ISA Curriculum: A Program for Emerging Self-Advocates with Autism Spectrum and Other Conditions*, Rudy Simone's *Asperger's in the Workplace*, and Zosia Zaks's *Life and Love: Positive Strategies for Autistic Adults*. If these books help, but someone is having difficulties implementing the authors' suggested strategies, we recommend consulting a job or life coach for assistance and direction.

This article serves only as a suggestion based on our experience working with individuals on the spectrum. GRASP is not responsible for loss or termination of employment due to an employee or a potential employee's decision to disclose or not disclose their disability to an employer.

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challenges on the job to employers, she/he needs to understand her/his self well enough to know what to ask for. She/he needs to be able to self-advocate. For instance, many individuals have overhead lighting and visual stimulus issues which makes it more difficult to process information. If there is a concern on the job about lighting, the employee could ask her/his employer for a workspace lamp or to work near a window for natural light. The employee self-advocated for her/his needs, which allowed her/him to be more productive without disclosing a diagnosis. Another example, involves verbal instructions. For many ASD individuals, auditory processing can be difficult. An employee with this challenge can self-advocate by requesting that they be given written instructions or guidelines about their job position, tasks, duties, and projects. Although an employer may not have ASD or understand what it is, an employer does understand what it means to need assistance and ask for help. This dialogue and collaboration creates the Common Ground, without the need for further explanation of the reasons for the request.

Discrimination Continues

Under the IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) and Section 504 (of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973), all

people who are diagnosed with ASD and who qualify are provided a Free and Appropriate Public Education. This protection changes after someone becomes an adult. Under the ADA (American's With Disabilities Act of 1990 and Rev. 2008), all people diagnosed with ASD cannot be discriminated against during the interview process or if they disclose after becoming an employee. Unfortunately, we have members of GRASP who have experienced discrimination because of their ASD diagnosis in both of these situations. This is one of the reasons we are advocating for people to consider utilizing self-advocacy before disclosing. By finding Common Ground and self-advocating for workplace needs, the employee (or future employee) is more likely to keep her/his job and be the best employee possible.

Conclusion

By finding the Common Ground of understanding and communication with an employer and self-advocating for workplace needs, the employee can become a better worker and assist the employer in creating a successful, productive business without the need for disclosure.

For individuals on the Autism Spectrum seeking employment or who are currently employed, we suggest reading the following books: Temple Grandin & Kate Duffy's *Developing Talents: Careers for Individuals with Asperger Syndrome*, Roger

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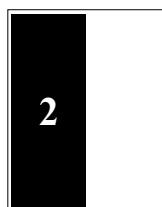
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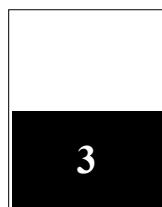
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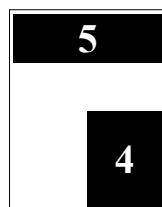
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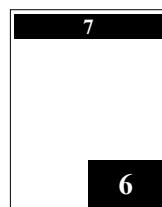
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